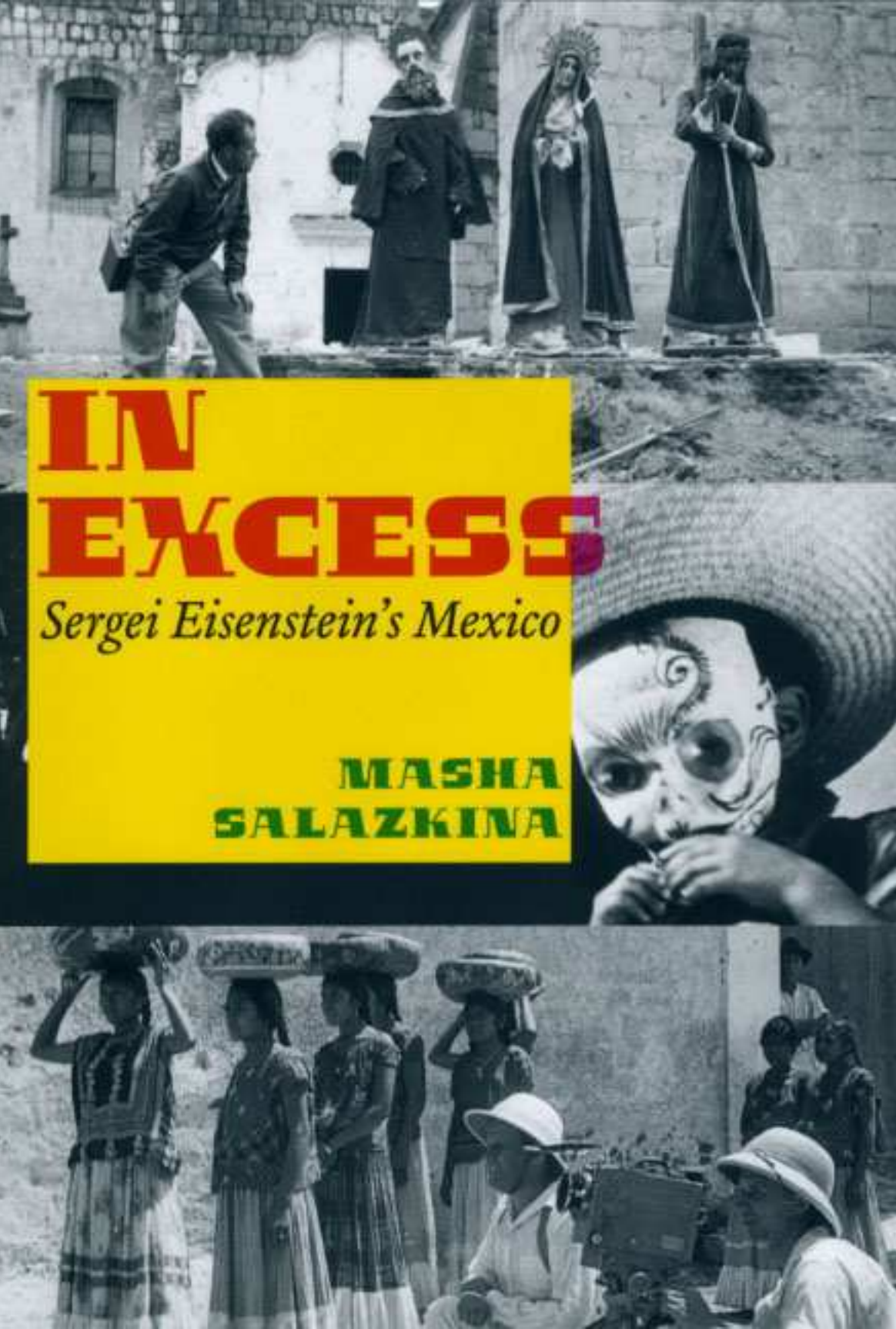

IN EXCESS

Sergei Eisenstein's Mexico

MASHA SALAZKINA

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CINEMA AND MODERNITY *A series edited by Tom Gunning*

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Sergei Eisenstein's Mexico

masha salazkina

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In memory of Olivier Debroise

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INTRODUCTION

In December of 1930, after realizing that the contract he had signed with Jesse Lasky at Paramount earlier in the year was not going to lead to any realizable project, Sergei Eisenstein and his crew, Eduard Tisse and Grigorii Alexandrov, traveled to Mexico to make a film, tentatively entitled *¡Que Viva México!* The project was to be funded by American socialist writer Upton Sinclair and his wife, Mary Craig Sinclair, with an agreement that Eisenstein would make a picture that was both artistic and commercial. However, for a number of reasons—cost overruns, personal and aesthetic conflicts, etc.—Sinclair ceased funding after Eisenstein had been shooting for a little over a year. In this time, Eisenstein and his crew had produced over two hundred thousand feet of film rushes, with a running time of some forty hours, although subtracting duplicate footage reduces the total time of the original to approximately six hours. Sinclair officially owned the film, but he nonetheless promised to send all of the Mexican footage to the Soviet Union, to which Eisenstein had to return under direct pressure from Stalin. In the event, Sinclair failed to fulfill his end of the bargain. Several short films utilizing Eisenstein's film footage were made with Upton Sinclair's permission: *Thunder over Mexico* (1933) and *Day of the Dead* (1934), both directed by Sol Lesser; *Time in the Sun*, made by Eisenstein's biographer, Mary Seton, in 1939–40; and *Mexican Symphony* (W. Kruse, 1941), utilizing comparatively little of the original footage.[1]

Sinclair finally handed over the footage to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1954. This material was analyzed and edited for study purposes as *Eisenstein Mexican Film: Episodes for Study* (1957, 225 minutes) by Jay Leyda, a former student of Eisenstein's film course at the Gosudarstyennyi Institut Kinimatografii (GIK) in the 1930s. He presented his reels to the 1958 Eisenstein Conference in Berlin, which aroused the interest of the Soviet Ministry of Cinema, but it was twenty years before MoMA agreed to transfer the original nitrate negatives to Moscow in 1979 and Grigorii Alexandrov, Eisenstein's assistant on the film, put together the version that is currently available commercially. More recently, in 1998, filmmaker Oleg Kovalov presented his own version of the film, *Mexican Fantasy*,

which rearranges the material to create Kovalov's own narrative from Eisenstein's footage, including a few sequences that had not been part of the earlier reconstructions.[2]

Eisenstein never lived to see any of his footage, and never edited a single sequence from it. *¡Que Viva México!* became the most famous of the many projects that Eisenstein never fully realized. Yet, as a result of his remarkable imaginative drive combined with his obsessive self-analysis, even those of Eisenstein's films that were never shot at all acquire a certain eerie ontological status in film scholarship because they bear the unmistakable mark of Eisenstein. Such "virtual" films include *An American Tragedy* (1929–30) or *The Glass House* (1926–30), projects that never came to be realized but exist as hundreds of pages of notes, or *Bezhin Meadow,* filmed in 1931–35 but then destroyed and now existing only as a collection of stills. *¡Que Viva México!* however, unlike those other projects, has a real materiality to it, evidenced by the many films to which it gave rise. If in some ways it is less than a film (lacking any sound or editing), in other ways it is more—in the sheer volume of the footage, in the coexistence of multiple scripts and notes on the film, as well as in the many (often conflicting) comments made by Eisenstein in his later essays and lectures on what the film was meant to be. Most recently, film director and historian Lutz Becker and his Mexican Picture Partnership Ltd. has acquired the exclusive rights to Eisenstein's concept and all film materials from Upton Sinclair's estate and is working on a reconstruction of what he considers to be the definitive version of the film. According to Becker, after sorting through and combining the remaining original negatives, the Sinclair rushes, the material held in Russia at the Gosfilmofond Archives, some nitrate materials and duplicate materials of *Thunder over Mexico* at MoMA, and, finally, the original negatives of *Time in the Sun* lodged with the National Film and Television Archive in London, he will have a film approximately one hour and forty minutes long.

For this book's visual analysis, I have used Alexandrov's reconstruction for the overall narrative framework of the film, as it is fairly in line with Eisenstein's working scripts (however inconsistent they are amongst themselves), while also working with the footage compiled by Jay Leyda, available at MoMA. Written accounts of the film come from a variety of sources, such as Eisenstein's letters, notes, and scripts. In addition to the archival materials from the Rossiiskii Gosudarstyennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva (RGALI), my foray into Eisenstein's theoretical thought has been largely based on a recent two-volume edition, *Metod*, which includes Eisenstein's writing, primarily from the late 1930s onwards, compiled by a specialist of Eisenstein's legacy, Naum Kleiman,

director of the Moscow Cinema Museum. The collection brings together Eisenstein's notes and drafts of essays dated between 1931 and 1947, all of which were intended to be included in a book on which Eisenstein was working during the last years of his life, which he provisionally entitled *Metod* (*Method*) or, alternatively, *Grundproblem*, and includes a wealth of previously unpublished materials. As Naum Kleiman asserts, this book, which was never completed, was intended to be a synthesis of the director's theoretical and philosophical legacy, and in the notes about it Eisenstein often turns to his Mexican experience, tying the two unfinished projects—one cinematic, one theoretical—together.[3]

The question of how to read this film in its unfinished, fragmented, and yet expansive form is intimately tied to the shift in Eisenstein's theoretical work. Indeed, positing a link between the state of the film and Eisenstein's epistemological shift will serve as a vector into my claim that the very *excess* evident in *¡Que Viva México!* can serve as a governing metaphor in Eisenstein's cinematic theory and practice at large.

A reading of any film by Eisenstein immediately presents a peculiar case of anxiety of influence, insofar as Eisenstein was his own first explainer, and generated both the vernacular and conceptual structures by which his films are often understood. Raymond Bellour alludes to this in the introduction to his volume, *The Analysis of Film,* in which he critiques Jean Mitry's treatment of Eisenstein: "One cannot help being struck by its semi-systematic descriptions, which try to subordinate the filmic material to a set of organizing principles. But . . . one immediately senses its limitations. For Mitry, it is only a matter of reorganizing and prolonging the analyses that Eisenstein himself provided of his films in his theoretical writings. The singularity of this attempt at reading arises from the exceptional situation of a director more 'conscious' of the determinations that rule the organization of his works. There is, in short, no textual unconscious, no displacement of the reading."[4]

It is easy to resist this attempt to subordinate all the filmic material into the terms of a rigid symbolic economy dictated by Eisenstein in the case of *¡Que Viva México!* because it exists only as a fragment, as a raw material, thus allowing our discontent with Eisenstein's control of the terms of his reception to surface in the "dis-contents" of a film that was never, in a sense, "received": its excess, the "waste of the production," the thousands of feet of pure wasted film, and the overspending that forced the Sinclairs to mortgage their home—are exactly all the things of which Eisenstein was accused by Sinclair. Yet how is one to reincorporate this excess in some system of meaning? Can one make a productive use of the waste?

Two books that deal with Eisenstein's stay in Mexico are *The Making and Unmaking of "¡Que Viva Mexico!"* edited by Harry Geduld and Ronald Gottesman in 1970, which includes only the sources from the Upton Sinclair Collection at Indiana University, and Inga Karetnikova and Leon Steinmetz's *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, which contains very little scholarly material.[5] This book, however, is not intended as a close analysis of Eisenstein's Mexican film: such analysis is, prima facie, impossible, given the unfinished and unedited state of the footage and the well-known fact of the importance Eisenstein placed on editing in his theory and practice. Moreover, an interpretation of a film, even if it were possible, is not what is at stake in this book. Nor is it a textual analysis of Eisenstein's writing, personal and theoretical—although I will turn to both visual and textual readings at times. Instead, this book is conceived as an investigation into the way Eisenstein's texts—the body of the unfinished film with all the materials surrounding it, such as scripts, notes, letters, and his theoretical writing from that time (1930–31), as well as the later writing informed by his Mexican experience—interact with the historical and cultural context of postrevolutionary Mexico and its dominant ideologies.

In order to draw these connections between Eisenstein and his Mexican milieu, I employ a variety of sources. Empirical material such as newspaper accounts, diaries, letters, and biographies are combined with theoretical, literary, and visual sources to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the social and textual realms.

In presenting this material, I am reconstructing the dialogue between the Soviet director's work and the culture in which he was immersed during his stay in Mexico, as it is reflected in both the unfinished film and Eisenstein's theoretical investigations. This involves a closer look at a broad sample of Eisenstein's written work, tracing the origins and developments of his theoretical concepts as they proceed from his Mexican period all the way to his later and lesser-known essays, notes, and reminiscences. These are the moments in the study when I read "with" Eisenstein as it were, his own ideas guiding the development of the arguments.

Putting Eisenstein's work in such a transnational and transcultural context recovers a moment in the development of modernism that has been buried by a critical consensus that still upholds, or at least assumes, the myth of exceptionalism of Eisenstein's theories in particular, and of the Soviet avant-garde at large. While there are excellent, if rare, accounts that break out of the Eurocentric framing of Eisenstein's work,[6] we have still not fully understood how distorting it is to treat Eisenstein, and, by implication, Soviet modernism, as compartmentalized and autarkic

phenomena. At the horizon of this project, then, is the question of the way Eisenstein's own work (filmic as well as theoretical) and other works that belong to this larger cultural context all shared the distinctly modernist conceptions of nonlinear temporalities as alternative genealogies, altering our understanding of historical temporality by means of an art that absorbed the real temporal dislocations in society brought about by technology—a project that is both shaped by and that shapes the new culture of modernity in Russia and Mexico. This speculative investigation must search, then, among a wider set of sources that are not all empirically connected to Eisenstein's Mexican film, but are dictated by the theoretical questions this view of modernism raises. Such an approach enables me to make a more symptomatic reading of Eisenstein's theories and his films by putting them in contact—anachronistically, as it were—with more contemporary theoretical thinking on this subject, as well as referencing those of Eisenstein's contemporaries, such as Walter Benjamin, who were involved in the shared intellectual and political quest to, as T. J. Clark writes, "imagine modernity otherwise."[7]

Thus, this book shows the inextricability of Eisenstein's oeuvre from a larger framework of what has now become a separate object of study for film and cultural historians: the relationship between the global cultures of modernity and film. This point of view places my work within a larger body of scholarship that explores this dynamic relationship. In particular, Tom Gunning's work on early cinema and cultures of modernity as well as Miriam Hansen's concept of the modernist vernacular helped me understand how the changing collective sensory experience of modernity was mediated and articulated through the language of cinema to become a modern global vernacular.[8]

The set of assumptions about the sensory embodiment and affective visceral quality of cinematic experience, which filmmakers quickly began to assume, is linked, as this scholarship has shown, to the global mass cultural aspect of moviegoing; hence it is popular (classical) Hollywood cinema that, according to Hansen, best embodies, in her famous phrase, the "mass production of the senses." Both Miriam Hansen and Yuri Tsivian in their work on cinema, as well as Susan Buck-Morss in her broader exploration of visual culture, show the connections to and the historical influence of American cinema and the reception of American culture on the Soviet avant-garde and on montage theory and practice in particular.[9] Hansen, however, posits an opposition between the mass (populist) aspect of Hollywood, which produced the vernacular aspects of the global modern experience, and avant-garde modernism—and the Soviet avant-garde in particular—as the "standard paradigm of

twentieth century modernism." I would argue that Eisenstein's modernist/avant-garde theories and practices—as well as that of the artists of the period often referred to as the Mexican Renaissance and their fellow travelers, in relation to whose ideology and practice this study places Eisenstein—embody the same qualities and partake of the same cultures, despite the difference in their respective receptions. It is well known that Eisenstein's "montage of attractions" theory in particular incorporates vernacular practices such as the circus, etc., and structures itself to maximize the visceral impact of the cinematic image on the viewer (just think of the famous sequences from *Strike* as the ultimate affective visceral experience—and anyone who has ever taught this film knows that the affective visceral response has not been altered by time, unlike that of many Hollywood films from the same period). Hansen makes this point when she mentions the "slumming mentality" in Eisenstein, and the Soviet preference for "cinematic pulp fiction" claimed by Shklovsky. As this book demonstrates, Eisenstein's later theory places even more importance on the bodily and affective aspect of the cinematic experience, thus unexpectedly making itself accessible to "a sensorial history of cinema," as Zhang Zhen recently called the move from a text-based to an affective-based paradigm of cinema.[10] Thus, for Eisenstein, avant-garde practice included both the emphasis on the visceral and sensory, as well as the vernacular and the popular (as attractions). Certainly it was created with a global—or, better phrased in Eisenstein's contemporary terms, internationalist—audience in mind, just as Hollywood film was, and as his work in Mexico—which used American financing, a Russian and Mexican crew, and Mexican locals—amply demonstrates. Avant-garde cinema then, at least as it was conceived by such figures as Eisenstein and the Mexican muralists, reflected and mediated the experience of the shock of modernization (the famous shock of the new) with varying strategies: at times trying to transform the audience's passivity in the face of it, at times counting on the routinization among the audience of this new sensory regime of modernity (with its emphasis on industrial production, for example). This takes us back to the issues raised in Andreas Huyssen's pioneering investigation of the vexed relationship between the popular (or, the vernacular, in Hansen's terms) and the avant-garde in his *After the Great Divide*.[11] This book takes its cues from themes raised by Hansen and Huyssen, but must lodge a somewhat polemical objection to the easy marginalization of the avant-garde in this narrative. On the contrary, in the context of both Mexico and the Soviet Union, the avant-garde played much more of a central role in the project of modernity and the very creation of vernacular modernism.

To understand the function of the avant-garde both in relation to the vernacular and in relation to modernization, we must take seriously its intrinsic and self-conscious utopianism, within the program of which it was able to provide imaginary possibilities for alternative routes—and roots—for capitalist modernities.[12] This utopian potential is often, as this book will show, linked to new formulations of temporalities as mediated through the body on the screen, once again bringing us to the centrality of the sensory and visceral mode of cinematic expressions. The emphasis on the body as mediating between the individual and collective historical experience is explored in Eisenstein through various modes: through the filmic registering of the effects of biological time on human bodies, especially those of women; through reference to the anthropological temporal dimension (with the body of "the native" in its center); and through the incorporation of the baroque affective regime (the hybridity of forms, the proliferation of static tableaus, etc.) as another alternative temporality.

This book's emphasis on the notion of divergent temporalities in Eisenstein opens it up to important recent scholarly work addressing the interconnection between temporalities formed by cinematic images and the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century revolution in understanding time. The changing cultures of modernity witnessed the weakening of the dominant unity of Newtonian time, and, by inference, phenomenologically given time. In its place came competing temporalities, with film acting both to generate and to codify them. This is explored by a number of works, including Mary Ann Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*; Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*; Laura Mulvey's *Death 24× a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*; and Garrett Stewart's work on modernism, as well as his most recent book on contemporary cinematic temporalities.[13] Of course, this book is limited in the scope and the sheer number of works necessary to make such historical claims, but while it centers on Eisenstein, I am not working in the spirit of the auteur approach, for as Garrett Stuart shrewdly notices, the demanding philosophical work by auteurs "is not given privileged access to the psychic drives . . . of an epoch,"[14] which is why the larger culture of Mexico in the process of modernization has so much independent weight in this study. Eisenstein's Mexican project is an episode through which the historical phenomena of a particular kind of modernism is materialized; it operates as both an example and a limit on the discussion of the construction of temporalities of modernity through cinema. Such a discussion must necessarily make its way though heterogeneous sources without getting too far from the reality of our example, placing at the center a

question, shared by all the authors listed above, which Stewart terms "the disjunction between world time and screen time."[15]

My emphasis on the dual marginality (Russia and Mexico) of Eisenstein's project in relation to the "centers of modernity" (western Europe and the U.S.) is meant to take cinema outside of the Eurocentric conceptions of modernism, along the lines suggested by Miriam Hansen in her short study on Shanghai cinema as modernist vernacular, which was brilliantly developed further by Zhang Zhen. This study likewise asserts the importance of broadening this term to other (non-European or U.S.) conditions of modernization and urbanization, and seeing how this vernacular played a key role in making the local increasingly porous, more vulnerable to the outside, while at the same time allowing for the possibility of staging the local in a global medium. This was an aspect of the complicated relationship between nationalism and global aspects of modernism. Within the nation, the effect of the global is felt in the creation of "the other" (as "the authentic native") that was on the one hand stigmatized by the marks of poverty and a bottom position in the hierarchy, and on the other hand appropriated as a national persona for the legitimization of the national discourse against outside cultures. This tension is integral to any analysis of modernity in Eisenstein's Mexican experience. Eisenstein was a foreigner who arrived in a country with the intention of creating that country's national epic, the history of Mexico from its origins to the present day, in film. His actions point to another important constituent of the culture of modernity: the centrality of this discourse of "the other." Perhaps this is best exemplified through the rise of anthropology in mediating between the internationalist aspirations and realities of the utopian modernist aesthetic and its dependence on nationalist projects. The popularity of anthropology in the twenties both among modernists like Eliot and Pound—Eliot using *The Golden Bough*, Pound using Frobenius's African ethnographies in his poetry—and with the public at large—this was the decade that saw two anthropological best sellers, Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928 and Malinowski's *The Sexual Life of Savages in North Western Melanesia* in 1929—is a subject that has been widely explored and it is not the main focus of this book. The implications of this connection, both for Mexican culture of the time and for Eisenstein's work, however, are crucial to my argument.

At this point I would like to turn to another aspect of this book. Due to the key importance of Eisenstein in both the material and critical/theoretical dimensions of cinematic history, I will begin by providing a framework for where it positions itself in relation to the large and significant body of the Eisensteinian scholarship that deals with purely

filmic issues in Eisenstein's theory and practice. Many of these issues center around the figure of the "primitive" and how it connects to the developments in Eisenstein's theories, especially in the last decade of his life, as a result of his Mexican experience.

In recent years, a number of scholars have addressed the way in which Eisenstein's experience in Mexico influenced his work and theory—most notably Oksana Bulgakowa in both her articles and biography of Eisenstein, and Anne Nesbet in her recent book.[16] Nesbet in particular emphasizes the importance of such concepts in Eisenstein's writing as "prelogical thought" and "Mlb"—"the return to mother's womb"—and has allotted an extensive focus to the Mexican period as formative in this respect.[17] Mikhail Iampolskii's articles provide the most thorough and subtle theoretical analysis of Eisenstein theories, but they place Eisenstein in the context of purely European philosophical tradition(s) and do not take the Mexican milieu into account. Yuri Tsivian's highly informed reading of *Ivan the Terrible* deals with many of the Eisensteinian motifs elaborated in this book; however, Tsivian never explicitly deals with *¡Que Viva México!* and its role in the progression of Eisenstein's ideas. I hope to put this book in a fruitful dialogue (and sometimes polemic) with all of these scholars. At the same time, their work informs mine in many ways.

The paradigmatic question for most Eisenstein scholars has become that of Eisenstein's development, and specifically how to relate his early (1920s) work to his later (post-1932) work. The first to address this issue was David Bordwell in his two essays, both published in *Screen* in 1974–75, "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift" and "Eisenstein's Epistemology: A Response."[18] Bordwell developed his thesis in *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, still the most fundamental piece on Eisenstein's theory and practice, in which he showed how dramatic shifts of interest and emphasis distinguished Eisenstein's early writing from his "mature poetics."[19] Bordwell showed that Eisenstein's later aesthetic theory was centered thematically on synthesis and organic unity, a shift away from the constructivist and formalist biases of his early theoretical work. Bordwell's thesis highlights the need for a good account of the striking changes that Eisenstein's filmmaking style underwent between the 1920s and the late 1930s. The French, English, and U.S. film theorists of the 1960s who preceded Bordwell had prepared the way here for the generally accepted outline of Eisenstein's career. These theorists (some of whom were also directors) were in part responsible for uncovering Eisenstein's theoretical legacy, but, for their own reasons, they made Eisenstein's work a captive of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s, of which they were ardent partisans. Consequently, they could only see Eisenstein's later works as a retreat to something

dangerously close to Socialist realism. In this narrative, Eisenstein's later theoretical works betray his earlier radical revolutionary attitude and practice, abandoning dialectics for the discourse of holistic organicity.

While all scholars agree that there is, indeed, a noticeable shift in Eisenstein's writing, the interpretations of that shift are strikingly different in the work of most scholars who directly address this question (most notably David Bordwell, Francois Albera, Annette Michelson and Oksana Bulgakova).[20] This spectrum of positions is to a great extent due to the fact that all these positions find textual support in his writing. The most noticeable departure from this notion of a "shift" can be found in Mikhail Iampolskii's writings on Eisenstein's theoretical work, which view his early poetics as a preparatory stage for the final synthesis.[21] In my own approach I am much indebted to Iampolskii's analysis, while at the same time trying to place it in a more historically and culturally specific context of the Soviet Union's and Mexico's struggles with/towards modernization in the 1920s and 1930s.

Returning to the structure of Eisenstein's theoretical work, it is clear that throughout his writings an axial preoccupation for him is the status of the relationship between two independent entities, usually in opposition to each other as a system of difference, be it on the level of two elements within one shot, two separate shots, etc. For Eisenstein, this relationship is reformulated in different ways within various frameworks, and while in the earlier works discontinuity and fragmentation are emphasized (using terms such as conflicts, jumps, and contrasts), his later vocabulary tends toward what could be termed a more "holistic" approach, insisting on correspondences and unity. The key terms, however reformulated, remain the same: montage and dialectics, both of which imply the centrality of relational composition. In these terms, what paradoxically appears to be at stake for the later Eisenstein is using montage and dialectics (with their structure of difference) to get to a state that is, in fact, nondifferentiated.

If Eisenstein's intellectual quest can be presented as a movement toward the synthesis of two opposites, it can also be read as the synthesis of the early "constructivist Eisenstein" (to borrow Albera's and Bordwell's term) and the later "organic Eisenstein." In his later work we witness a synthesis of psychology and physiology through the experience of *pathos* and *ex-stasis*, which provides the necessary shift toward a unified, nondifferentiated state. If the governing metaphor for dialectical montage in the early Eisenstein is a collision (or explosion), in later Eisenstein it is replaced by growth and ex-stasis.

Not only does a reading of Eisenstein's texts risk being subordinated to the director's own expressed theorization of them, but Eisenstein's

filmmaking itself has been famously critiqued by Andre Bazin for its overdetermination of the images to the exclusion of any ambiguity or ambivalence, such that image acts merely in the service of the predetermined meaning.

Eisenstein in his writing, too, sought to synthesize everything and fit all phenomena into a neat economy of meaning by drawing upon extremely disparate fields of knowledge in an attempt to produce a formula that governs them all, yet his own writing characteristically resists any such economy, producing constant detours and narrative excesses, which become more and more pronounced throughout his work. These features, in turn, can be seen as analogous to the baroque quality of his visual images. Having acknowledged this, one has to read both "with" Eisenstein and "against" him, trying to determine the formula and its application, while at the same time trying to read all that resists this economy of meaning—the excess (which is not unrelated to what Raymond Bellour calls "the textual unconscious"). Through this kind of the reading, *¡Que Viva México!* as a whole is an example of just that: a body of film that in the process of its creation would not be subordinated into any fixed system, its raw filmic material constantly overflowing and breaking out of the predetermined structure, inevitably embracing the contingent as a result. Similarly, on the personal level, Eisenstein's stay in Mexico was marked by an unmatched burst of creative activity, as is evident from his drawings, and sexual experimentation.

Theory and autobiography in Eisenstein are constantly intertwined. Starting from the late 1920s, Eisenstein continuously worked on books about himself and his art: in 1929 he conceived of writing a collection to be called *My Art in Life*, and throughout the rest of his career he combined theoretical investigation with autobiographical exploration, as is evident in, for example, his notes toward *Metod* as well as in his letters and notes. By constantly drawing examples from his personal (and, in particular, his intimate) life, Eisenstein sought to project his theoretical "method" onto his own body and his psyche, making an explicit link between his writings and his personal life; between thought and action. This tendency was especially strong in the last years of his life, when he intertwined the writing of his last collection of theoretical essays with personal memoirs. During his stay in Mexico, Eisenstein illustrated the material for the film and his theoretical investigations with notoriously pornographic drawings. This suggests a possibility of reading the visual and textual excess in Eisenstein as evidence of a cultural and historical (and perhaps even personal) anxiety over the body in a desperate attempt to mediate between the continuity of history and the shock of modernity.

Trying to find internal correspondences between all phenomena, "the structure of things,"[22] Eisenstein in his work strives to get at the "dynamic totality"[23] (absent from either individual or collective experience) that he locates in the body, finding correspondences between its biological evolutionary development and the structure of art and of the unconscious. This anxiety about the body becomes anxiety about history itself, given the overlap between theory and autobiography, the latter understood as an attempt to write history through subjective experience and to restore historical continuity through the continuity of the body.

There is, however, a certain confusion in Eisenstein's writing about whether this nondifferentiated state lies outside of time and history, or whether it is merely a return to the prehistoric (both in biological/psychoanalytical and in anthropological terms) as linked to his writing on the pre-regress and the return to the womb. The development of Eisenstein's concept in the 1930s of the "sensuous" (or prelogical) thought is rooted in anthropology but is consistently linked in his writing to the return to an originary biological state, to the mother's womb (to which he always refers as "Mlb" [*sic*], *MutterleibsVersenkung*, borrowing the term from Otto Rank). This evolution of the human body is presented in Eisenstein's writings as parallel to the evolution of all living organisms, the starting point of which is the protoplasm. As he conceives it, analogous to this evolutionary trajectory is sociopolitical history with its original undifferentiated class system. This, however, is not yet the nondifferentiated dynamic unity—the Hegelian synthesis—at which Eisenstein is striving to arrive. His "way of regress"[24] is a mere return which requires no dialectics, or perhaps only a starting point for the process of becoming, but one which requires its dialectical opposite to complete the qualitative leap. In the process of synthesis, which occupied Eisenstein throughout his career, the structure of difference is replaced by a dissolving of all differences into a utopian unified whole, a totality that is merely an attempt to restore the original state and that is not achieved by means of transformation; a false totality in the dialectical sense, and certainly a false dialectic. By subsuming the dialectics and the very structure of difference into a romanticized whole, Eisenstein tends to the opposite of his quest: instead of "going out of one's self" in ex-stasis, he in fact ends up solipsistically projecting himself onto the rest of the world, eradicating "the other."[25] The stronger this tendency in his writing, the more excessive and baroque his images become, as is manifested most clearly in *Ivan Groznyi/Ivan the Terrible* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1958), as Kristin Thompson's analysis (although done from a very different methodological position) shows.[26] In his later

work, Eisenstein's apparent repression of the structure of difference by means of presenting art as a unified totality results in proliferation of excess. By repressing the notion of sexual difference, for example, in favor of the "bi-sex" (which Eisenstein identifies with the earlier prelogical forms of being), he in fact creates not the radical totality but rather a utopian community of effeminized men, quite simply excluding women from the picture. While women in Eisenstein's films figure as links to the premodern originary state (after all, you need a womb to come back to!), the transformed state of unity simply replaces them with men. In *Bronenosets Potemkin/Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), this unity is represented as a revolutionary unity of sailors on board the *Potemkin*. In *Ivan* this tendency is even stronger, and the overflow of the visual excess there is accompanied by the process of the replacement and eventual eradication of the presence of women: thus, for example, as both Yuri Tsivian and Joan Neuberger demonstrate, in part 2 of the film, Fedor Basmanov visually and structurally occupies the place of Ivan's deceased wife, Anastasia, becoming "Ersatz Anastasia."[27] This replacement reaches its culmination in the famous color sequence in part 2: a scene that mirrors that of Ivan's wedding and that Yuri Tsivian calls an "all-male revel."[28]

Indeed, a major focus of my work is on such instances in the footage of *¡Que Viva México!* (which, again, even in its production, is itself evidence of excess in the overflow of meaning and images and its reluctance to be subordinated to any economy) as demonstrating anxiety over the status of the other. I would argue, however, that unlike in the case of *Ivan*, in *¡Que Viva México!* the dialectic is still at work, not completely subsumed by the organic principle, and that the return to the premodern is still mediated by its opposite, the ultramodern revolutionary impulse, which connects Eisenstein to the specific political issues facing Mexico and the Soviet Union at the time. In this way, I restore to the question of the shift an extra-aesthetic dimension, a politics that is all too often seen as being externally impinged upon Eisenstein's work (through, say, Stalinist coercion) instead of being the sum of Eisenstein's experiences at the time.

As the diverse geographic origins of the sources that I use in this volume indicate, my approach implies multiple and essential connections between the arts on the left in the Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States in the period of the 1920s and 1930s. In spite of the specificities and differences of each case, they constitute one story. In the case of this project, this story includes the Soviet Union, Mexico, and the United States. The artistic and political scene of that period was a tightly woven network of artists, intellectuals, and political figures (who often switched

between roles), who either literally crossed borders between the three countries or crossed them through their writings and artwork, thus producing an interdependency between these different art scenes. Although the immediate impression left by Mexico on Soviet art is perhaps faint (with the notable exceptions of Rivera and Eisenstein), its leading artists influenced their U.S. counterparts. There was a great deal of artistic and intellectual interaction between the neighboring countries through the art journal *Mexican Folkways*, through the articles in the *New Masses* and the *New Republic*, and the actual artwork of the muralist painters in the United States. The U.S. writers and artists who were involved in this process in turn were important in the Soviet arena, both politically (through the various societies that they belonged to, such as the Friends of the Soviet Union, or working for the Soviet press agency TASS in the U.S.) and culturally, often by serving as a point of reference for the radical Soviet artists and writers. Their stories are part of a narrative arc that charts the emergence, rise, and subsequent decline of the alliance between avant-garde art and radical politics. Eisenstein's Mexican project fits into the larger picture of the way artists in the modernist era tried to negotiate in their work the possibilities of the relationship between art and the state, as well as between art and life itself, between the past and the future, between nationalism and internationalism, between folk art of the past and the promise of future technology.[29]

If this cultural history of the 1920s and 1930s still holds a meaning and promise for us today, then it is extremely important to see it precisely in terms of its often irresolvable contradictions, internal tensions, governing anxieties, and unavoidable inconsistencies. I believe my focus on the "woman question" as well as on the issues of national identity and constructions of history is the best approach to teasing apart these tensions, anxieties, and contradictions, pointing to some of the reasons for the failure of these radical projects.

For all of the reasons listed above, my book gives a rather odd status to Sergei Eisenstein's film *¡Que Viva México!* taking it as at once central and liminal to my larger project. It provides an emblematic and fruitful instance for framing a discussion of the main problems and debates that occupied these figures from the late 1920s through early 1931. The background and historical context for the making of this film bring together—in most cases directly, although in some cases more implicitly—most of the key figures of the Mexican, American, and Soviet leftist culture. As a result, perhaps, the text of the film itself (in spite of the fact that it was never completed) can be read as both a record and a product of these interactions, reflecting on the important issues

that preoccupied the artistic and political debates of that international scene. Eisenstein proved to be perhaps the only Russian in Mexico who managed to produce something more than a pure projection of Mexico. *¡Que Viva México!* is more than just another European's vision of the exotic land, but rather provides textual evidence of an intense dialogue between the Soviet filmmaker and some of the main figures of the Mexican art scene. The film is rich in intertextuality both on the visual level, often referring us to the works of the Mexican muralists and the photographers Agustín Jiménez and Tina Modotti, among others, and on the intellectual level, engaging in ideological polemics that were contemporary to Mexico of the 1920s and 1930s. This film can only be read accurately within the larger context of the movement of Mexican Renaissance and of postrevolutionary Mexican ideology. Here we touch upon a central paradox in my approach and method. Though my intention is not to work within the narrow limits of the Eisenstein industry, due to the library of books by specialists on Eisenstein, I must, unavoidably, deal with issues that have currency within the literature on Eisenstein. But these references serve, in the end, to bring forward a larger thesis about the interaction between modernism's new aesthetics, the shared utopian vision of a global set of intellectuals and activists, and the appropriation of locally generated "others" within the wider international vernacular of film.

The seeds of this comparison between modern art in Mexico and the Soviet Union are planted in Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's essay on Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti's 1983 Whitechapel exhibition:

> It is worth comparing the art-historical fate of the Mexican renaissance with that of Russian art of the 1920s. There are similarities between the two experiences. In both countries the example of cubism enabled artists independently to develop a specific culture of modern art. In both countries the overthrow of *ancien regime* (tsarism, the *porfiriato*) and the recasting of the society after political revolution and civil war gave the avant-garde a particular vision of its role, to produce the new art for the new society. . . .
>
> Recent years have seen a great revival of interest in the Russian avant-garde and particularly in the ways in which art and politics converged and clashed. Many of the same issues and problems arose in Mexico at the same time—the relationship of the avant-garde artist with the mass audience, the role of collective work, the relationship between art and craft, the absorption of cubism into a complex national culture, the relationship between propagandist content and innovative formal concerns, and so on.[30]

To this list of similarities I would add something made explicit in Mulvey and Wollen's article: the marginal position of the two countries at the time, both geographically and culturally, vis-à-vis Europe and the U.S., and the resulting anxiety regarding the cultural and economic hegemony of those centers that each country felt. Mulvey and Wollen connect the "uneven development" of Mexico and Russia to the historic moment that allowed for the convergence of art and politics following the two revolutions. In both nations, the self-consciousness of their marginal positions in the world system generated a perceived necessity of reaffirming the national, not only by competing against the metropoles through revolutionary political action, but also by bringing to light a marginalized and repressed history of the other—of the peasant, the Indian, the woman—that put in question the "natural" domination of the European, the capitalist, and the development of instrumental rationality itself. In both Mexican and Soviet avant-garde art of that period there was an immediate connection between the use of primitivism and the renewed sense of nationalism.[31] Just as the search for national origins led Mexican artists in the direction of the Aztec culture and contemporary indigenous arts and crafts, Russian intellectuals and artists looked toward the "Orient" as the mythical foundation for their national expression, as well as to peasant art forms. This turn to the Orient has as complicated and dialectical a relationship to contemporary Western culture as does, in the case of Mexico, the turn to Aztec and Spanish colonial art. Artists were drawn to these sources to a large extent as a gesture of resistance and rejection of the Western (primarily European) cultural hegemony. At the same time, the national identity fashioned from these indigenous traditions was always filtered through the very Western traditions that these artists were ostensibly resisting. One sees this, on a formal level, in the obvious legacy of cubism (and, for the Mexicans, also in the Italian Renaissance).[32] Among the avant-gardists, there was a consistent tension between, on the one hand, archaism, a conscious return to the past, to the premodern, traditional, especially folk art; and on the other, a futurism, embodied in particular in the promise of technology. Both in Mexico and in the Soviet Union, these "archaic" and ultramodern elements, often directly connected to the promise of new technology, were central for the arts in the decades following their respective revolutions.

This historical dialectic has been mirrored in art and culture, as modernism in its various manifestations has oscillated between these two poles: between the premodern and ultramodern, between the organic and the constructed, between nature and technology, between continuity and rupture. And it is often the representation of women

(and gender in general) that has served as a perfect indicator and a testing ground for this complex relationship. Representation of women has always had this dual function: women are most often associated with the natural and premodern, with nature and agriculture, and because of their role in the domestic sphere and as mothers they are often linked to tradition and continuity in the society. There are countless examples of the various allegories about "mother earth," the nation, and so on. Simultaneously, the representation of women (and gender), once divorced from this organic discourse, very often functions as a subversive signifier in the narrative, providing a rupture, or at least challenging the social harmony and the symbolic economy. The figure of women in modern art can be seen as a symptom of modernity and the anxiety it provokes: think of the flapper girls in the early films (the new woman), or of the way that women usually function as subversive in utopian narratives.

Eisenstein's treatment of the construction of the national identity through the indigenous heritage in Mexico and his unexpected focus on women in the Mexican film reflect this challenge: to construct a vision of historicity through art that would successfully mediate between the past and the present, the traditional and the modern, while not falling into the trap of either historical evolutionism (which completely undermines the complexity of this relationship by insisting on the inevitable victory of modernization) or the mythological construction of history, which privileges the "natural" and obliterates any possibility of social change. His confrontation with these issues in his film makes *¡Que Viva México!* a particularly interesting test case for the exploration of all of these issues just as they were disappearing from the Soviet art of that period.

Intellectuals in both Mexico and the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s were engaged in the project of creating a new postrevolutionary modern identity to negotiate between rupture and tradition, and between the cause of internationalism and nationalism. Their situation testified to the possibility of change that came with modernity, and even to the possibility of abrupt, revolutionary change, a rupture in the supposed logic of history brought about as an exercise in the will of the people rather than as some product of involuntary historical change thrown up by events such as invasion, war, or economic depression. It was the technostructure of communication, transportation, and the projection of the senses in various artificial media, all of them the result of intellectual invention, that made this kind of intentional rupture possible only in the modern age, just as the very concept of nationalism and internationalism also only became possible in the modern age.

As a result of its revolution, Mexico in the postrevolutionary years and up until the mid- or late 1920s represented to the rest of the Americas something similar to what the Soviet Union represented in the immediate postrevolutionary years to western Europe or the U.S.—a space open to political, cultural, and even sexual dissent, an opportunity to create a society based on completely different laws than those of the contemporary capitalist world, as a threat, utopia, or a tangle of both. As Carlos Monsivais describes what he calls "two spaces of freedom": Mexico City, with "its demographic volume and cultural environment of shifting social moral permissiveness afforded to the artists," and the Mexican Revolution itself, which "brought about direct and indirect stimulus of previously inconceivable attitudes and behaviors."[33]

Both countries were seen by foreigners as the space where "otherness" flourished—a utopian vision, indeed. But it is this space of freedom—imaginary as much as actual—that produced the remarkable cluster of artistic production that this book explores.

The chapters in this book follow the intended format of Eisenstein's film, with each chapter dealing with a different "novella" constituting *¡Que Viva México!* This is due to the fact that the sequence of the episodes was crucial to Eisenstein's conception of history. The "Prologue" is situated in an abstract mythological past; the "Epilogue" represents the present of postrevolutionary Mexico and its potential for the future, with all of the history of the country in between. At the same time, the epilogue was intended as a synthesis of the pre-Columbian mythology manifested in the prologue and the evolution of Mexican history. Since the particular sequence of these episodes provided a model for Eisenstein's theoretical work, I found it necessary to follow his lead. I made a decision to exclude from this study "Soldadera," an episode that was intended to precede the epilogue and depict the events of the Mexican Revolution, focusing on the women's role in it. While the idea behind this novella would be extremely appropriate for the various themes this book raises, none of the footage for it was ever shot, and the mentions of it in Eisenstein's writings are frequent but extremely brief, thus pushing the speculative aspect of such an effort further than I am willing to take it. For these reasons "Soldadera" is left out of this study.

Chapter 1—the "Prologue"—places Eisenstein's images in relation to the anthropological discourse on Mexican postrevolutionary state ideology, focusing in particular on Jose Vasconcelos, Roberto Montenegro, and Adolfo Best Maugard as some of its key ideologues. While Eisenstein's stay in Mexico happened a decade after Vasconcelos's cultural policies were in place, many of Eisenstein's friends in Mexico had

brought with them the hopes and disappointments of that moment in Mexican history, thus influencing Eisenstein's vision of the country and its culture. The chapter looks at the representation of the indigenous in *¡Que Viva México!* pointing out ways in which it was linked to the Mexican muralist project, through Eisenstein's interactions with Adolfo Best Maugard, the official Mexican "consultant" (censor) to Eisenstein, to the anthropological discourse and in particular to Franz Boas's work. I argue that these theories were particularly attractive for Eisenstein because of the emerging emphasis on the premodern in his own theoretical investigations. The chapter explores Eisenstein's visual and narrative synthesis of pre-Columbian culture in its inherent claim to permanence with the ultramodern and the iconoclastic revolutionary impulse. This is instantiated by a reading of Siqueiros's mural *The Burial of a Sacrificed Worker* (*Entierro del obrero sacrificado*) in relation to Felipe Carillo Puerto, the assassinated socialist leader from Yucatán, as an intertext to the Mayan burial in the prologue of Eisenstein's film.

Chapter 2 explores links between the representation of women and "the primitive" (or the indigenous) in the episode "Sandunga" as it reflects the dual function of woman as the figure for the essential and natural, but at the same time a force that is subversive to the masculine symbolic economy. My work links this to Eisenstein's concepts of "the prelogical," which he developed primarily during his stay in Mexico. In a dialectical twist, women in the film provide the link between radical politics and the return to a presymbolic unity. The chapter also traces particular images of women in "Sandunga" to their representations in other artists' work, such as Tina Modotti's photography and Diego Rivera's murals. It argues that Eisenstein's representation of the "primitive" matriarchical regime in Tehuantepec, where the episode takes place, is consistent with Mexico's revolutionary ideology of *indigenismo* and its manifestation in the muralist paintings. Yet the episode, with its emphasis on the untouched quality of the rural landscape of Tehuantepec, creates sharp dissonance with Eisenstein's films that directly preceded and followed *¡Que Viva México!*: both *The Old and the New (General'naia Liniia,* 1929*)* and *Bezhin Meadow (Bezhin Lug,* 1934–37) are a celebration of the violent and aggressive modernization of the Russian countryside.

The third chapter combines a reading of "Fiesta" and "Maguey." It isolates the baroque as the dominant aesthetic system of the two episodes. The reading focuses on the excessive detail in the film's imagery and its violent homoeroticism, developing these themes from the previous chapter. The chapter further links digressive sexuality in the film as subversive to a symbolic economy centered on production. It links Eisenstein's use

of baroque excess and imagery to his later writing on the protoplasm and the bi-sex as an originary state of nature and human consciousness, prior to sexual differentiation. The chapter concludes with an investigation of the treatment of homoerotism as it is linked in the film to religious ecstasy, an identification supported by remarks in Eisenstein's personal correspondence. The materials drawn upon here have not previously been translated into English or discussed by other scholars at any length. This chapter also compares and contrasts the representation of women in *¡Que Viva México!* to Katherine Anne Porter's short story "Hacienda," written at the same location as where the film was shot. Porter's story provides a fictionalized account of an episode in the making of the film, utilizing many of the same images and exploring the same preoccupations.

Chapter 4 continues the analysis of the baroque aesthetic in relation to the film. It looks at the "Epilogue" and focuses on the allegory of the skull during the Day of the Dead as central to the narrative structure of the film, juxtaposing Eisenstein's project with Walter Benjamin's work on the use of baroque allegory as a means to a radically dialectical construction of history. In addition, the chapter traces some of the imagery in the epilogue to the projects by Agustín Jiménez, Eisenstein's contemporary Mexican photographer, to the cabaret culture of Mexico City on the one hand, and to the 1930s Mexican urban architectural and industrial projects on the other. In conclusion, the discussion returns to the question of gender, and compares the images of the Day of the Dead in *¡Que Viva México!* to a painting by Frida Kahlo depicting the same subject. The conclusion addresses the traumatic impact that the loss of the footage of *¡Que Viva México!* had on the Soviet director, bringing to bear in the analysis the metaphors used in Eisenstein's writing about the film.

1

EISENSTEIN'S *¡QUE VIVA MÉXICO!*

"PROLOGUE," PREHISTORY, ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND NATIONALIST DISCOURSES

Nearly lost beneath the wall's surface, luminous next to bald white plaster, unfinished and empty, one perceives it there amidst these scratched and mutilated walls and fading colors—a coffin of intense aquamarine. We know these painted coffins from the engravings of Posada. Our movie screen knows something similar. The mourning brown faces of workers burying a comrade, the coffin stretches through the surface in a tragic crack in the silent conflict between pain and anger. . . . The conflict on the wall is a paroxysm of despair, wanting to bust into sobs—and frozen in a synthesis on the wall. —SERGEI EISENSTEIN, *Memuary*[1]

This chapter will proceed through a number of steps to embed Eisenstein's film project in the cultural situation of Mexico at that time. It begins by addressing the theme of origins in relation to *¡Que Viva México!*—the origins of the film itself and its various conceptions, and the way that the mythological origins of Mexico were created and developed

in a postrevolutionary Mexican discourse that was heavily influenced by the contemporary developments in anthropology and archeology. Placing the "Prologue" of the film in dialogue with such key figures of Mexican postrevolutionary culture as Jose Vasconcelos, Roberto Montenegro, and Adolfo Best Maugard, this chapter will explore the way Eisenstein's use of the emerging anthropological discourse on the continuity of pre-Columbian and modern culture in Mexico was mediated by his interest in the radical politics of the 1920s, thus creating the dual temporality built into the images in the "Prologue." This chapter will also introduce some of the most important characters in the story of Eisenstein in Mexico and provide a brief sketch of the cultural landscape of Mexico, starting with the decade preceding Eisenstein's arrival, when the rudiments of the cultural system that associated anthropology, politics, and the emergence of what is now known as the Mexican Renaissance in the arts came into existence. It will then turn to Eisenstein's own conceptions of the primitive—or what he, following Levy-Bruhl, referred to as "prelogical" or sensuous thinking—as one of the points of connections with the Mexican postrevolutionary culture.

¡QUE VIVA MÉXICO!: PREHISTORY

Eisenstein's first real encounter with Mexican culture was perhaps in the fall of 1927 when Diego Rivera, one of the most famous Mexican revolutionary artists and a fellow muralist (and future artistic and political rival) of Siqueiros, visited Moscow. Like many other foreign visitors to Moscow at the time, Rivera stayed at the Bristol Hotel, where the guest book included the names of Alfred Barr Jr., who later became a famous historian of Soviet art; Joseph Freeman, future writer and editor of the leftist journal *Free Masses* in New York and TASS representative in Mexico (1929); and the U.S. writer Harry Longfellow Dana. These were well-known figures at the time in the loosely connected global network of modernist critics, collectors, and promoters. Rivera apparently found it easy to assimilate to Muscovite society, owing to the fact that he knew many Russians from his days in Paris. Furthermore, he had remained good friends with Mayakovsky, who had stayed with Rivera two years earlier and contributed to the dissemination of publicity about Rivera's artistic works in Moscow.

Eisenstein met with Rivera on October 17, receiving the Mexican artist in his apartment in Chistye Prudy. Rivera showed him a German monograph on his murals, as well as Tina Modotti's photographs taken a year before to accompany them.[2]

Upon seeing Rivera's work, Eisenstein apparently recalled the macabre prints of Mexican folk artist José Guadalupe Posada, which he had come upon by accident in the German magazine *Kolnische Illustrierte*. Both Rivera's revolutionary murals and Posada's prints had already been subject to laudatory mention by Mayakovsky in his Mexican travel notes, *My Discovery of America* (*Moe Otkrytie Ameriki*), published in 1926. Thus, it is not surprising that upon his arrival in Mexico, Eisenstein set off to study both pre-Columbian cultural artifacts and the contemporary art of Mexico, especially the works of the muralists Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros, ultimately deciding that his film would be an homage to these artists.[3] Of equal importance to Eisenstein was Anita Brenner's book *Idols Behind Altars*, which promoted a similar synthesis of the pre-Columbian and the ultramodern, and which Eisenstein read just prior to his arrival in Mexico. We shall return to Brenner and her role as Eisenstein's interlocutor later in this chapter and the next. For now, a brief sketch of the development of postrevolutionary cultural ideology of Mexico will help us contextualize Eisenstein's fascination with the indigenous culture.

Turning to Mexico's distant past in the "Prologue," Eisenstein's film simultaneously reflects the importance of the pre-Columbian foundations of Mexican history, and the revival of this past as part of the postrevolutionary national ideology of *indigenismo*,[4] to which the muralist project of Rivera and Siqueiros is intimately tied.

The revival of the figure of the *indigeno* as central to the new national identity was linked to a new emphasis on the scientific study of premodern culture originating in the work of Franz Boas, a German/American ethnologist and linguist. Through his theory of cultural relativism, this "father of modern cultural anthropology" broke the hold of cultural and racial evolutionism in the social sciences and philosophy. Boas had visited Mexico, where his lectures met with great success. Boas had helped create the Escuela Internacional de Antropologia y Etnologia in Mexico City in 1910, and one of his pupils, Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who received his doctorate under Boas at Columbia in 1922, expressly saw in Boas's anthropological project an instrument to integrate Indians into the Mexican state.[5] In his studies Boas assigned a special role to folklore and to artistic production, that of the capacity to transmit the forms of "original" culture and consciousness.[6] The ideological cultural platform of postrevolutionary Mexico, its great diversity notwithstanding, was again deeply rooted in the creation of a new national identity based on indigenismo or *mestizofilia*—the indigenous pre-Columbian origin of the nation and its culture, and the celebration of miscegenation at the root of the Mexican nation.

The claim that all Mexicans and all Mexican art and culture had indigenous roots served as a unifying concept for the new postrevolutionary identity. Underneath that unity, however, there were deep conflicts about the interpretation of the "indigenous" past, reflecting divides between postrevolutionary Mexican ideologies that resisted easy categorization into traditional "left" and "right" terms.

José Vasconcelos, the rector of the National University and the head of Secretary of Public Education in the early 1920s, became the first official ideologue of this movement. He used the power of the state to endorse and disseminate a simple and powerful historical narrative: the glorious pre-Hispanic past was mediated by the high European criollo culture of the Spaniards, with their roots in a classical (Greco-roman) tradition that paralleled, in so many ways, the cultural patterns of the pre-Columbian kingdoms. Invigorated by a genuinely new American spirit, this Hispanic and non-Hispanic combination had produced a culture pregnant with intimations of a great future. The idea of racial, cultural, and historical continuity between pre-Columbian and contemporary Mexico was central.

In his quest for a new artistic (and mythological) canon for the new nation, Vasconcelos actively constructed new foundational myths for his imaginary Mexico. In all of them, the way in which gender and ethnicity are presented is crucial. Perhaps most important are the mutually reinforcing figures of the rural teacher (most readily incarnated in the figure of Vasconcelos's mistress, the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral) and of Quetzalcoatl, the "plumed serpent" of D. H. Lawrence's eponymous novel, who regenerates the earth (an image that will reappear in Rivera's murals as well as in Eisenstein's film). In his autobiographical writings, *De Robinson a Odiseo: Pedagogía estructurativa*, Vasconcelos mythologizes himself as a combination of a Hispanic Ulysses returning to his native land after years of traveling, a teacher of the young, and a figure who brings back to his country the benefits of culture as an instrument of democracy.[7]

Vasconcelos's mythopoetic task of forging a shared Mexican identity was to no small degree modeled on Soviet agitprop efforts. The intended result of the operations of the Public Education Department, which supported a broad range of cultural activities, was to assimilate "the Mexican" to "the indigenous." This conception of a state formation is reflected in the murals, with their depiction of a utopian pre-Hispanic community as a shared national space. While Vasconcelos's ideological platform emphasized the figure of the indigenous, at the same time it

assigned a special civilizing mission to education as a means of universal spiritual transcendence, with the didactic role performed by the state (and Vasconcelos as its representative). But, as Olivier Debroise notes in his *Figuras en el Tropico*, while the art of the muralists was governed by a very strong antibourgeois impulse both in art and ideology, an impulse shared by Vasconcelos to the extent that he identified "bourgeois" with the Porfirian emphasis on French academism, this new emphasis on the indigenous was rapidly assimilated and vulgarized in everyday lower-middle-class culture—proof that this construction did, in fact, resonate with the collective needs of the society. Thus in 1921 the newspaper *El Universal* organized its first pageant of indigenous beauty in response to the new canons from above. The winner was *La India Bonita* (*The Pretty Indian*) Bibiana Bribiesca, of a Mixtec origin from the state of Puebla, who did not speak a word of Spanish but who was received by the secretaries of state during tea time, with photographs published in *El Universal* to prove it.[8]

So we see that the legitimization of the cultural platform of the Mexican Revolution was dependent on the glorification and mythologizing of the pre-Hispanic past and on figuring indigenes as noble savages to be civilized. Another key ideologue of the movement, anthropologist Manuel Gamio, continued this emphasis on the indigenous, but within a somewhat different intellectual and cultural framework.

Vasconcelos, who was primarily a believer in the classical European tradition and "educating the indio," presented a vision of a syncretic nation, where the tradition of the humanism, education, and rationalism of Western enlightenment merged with quasimystical (symbolist) premodern culture. This synthesis of European humanism (with elements of classicism) and the intuitivist premodern soul was to result in the formation of a "cosmic race, which, supported by the arts and education as the main instruments of the state ideology, would culminate in absolute unity, subsuming all particulars: unity will be consummated there by the triumph of fecund love and the improvement of all the human races."[9] This unity, as we shall see, is not entirely unlike the organic unity and evolutionary approach to anthropology elaborated in Eisenstein's later writings. Vasconcelos's vision of the world was shared in particular by Roberto Montenegro and Adolfo Best Maugard, as well as by Diego Rivera, at least in the early stages of his artistic work in Mexico.

Unlike Vasconcelos, whose ideology derived from a background steeped in European classicism and humanism, with elements of fin-de-siècle mysticism, Manuel Gamio (who was Boas's student in New York) belong to a new generation, one we can associate more directly with

cultural relativism in anthropology and its cognate echoes in the avant-garde (postcubist) movements in art. Gamio and his disciples, which included most of Anita Brenner's circle, were allergic to Vasconcelos's hothouse esoterism; instead, their intellectual influences included Einstein, Malinowksy, and Freud, among others. While Gamio initially participated in Vasconcelos's projects (primarily working in archeology), after Calles became president in 1924 and Vasconcelos lost his position and left the country, Gamio saw his political power increase, especially as he became closely associated with the vision of the new government, along with Vasconcelos's successor at the Ministry of Education, Moisés Sáenz.

Unlike Vasconcelos, Sáenz did not consider art as a vehicle for creating a "cosmic race," assigning it instead an explicit role of creating a sense of nationalist unity and cultural identity based on pre-Columbian origins.[10] Sáenz himself was a Protestant, a rare denominational choice in Mexico. From John Dewey, whose student he had been at Columbia University, he imbibed a distrust of metaphysics, and a tendency to measure cultural policy by pragmatic parameters. He shared with Gamio the emphasis on cultural integration and modernization. While indigenous origins were emphasized, the Gamio-Sáenz ideological platform was oriented to the pragmatic and populist, largely in synch with John Dewey's in the U.S. (Dewey himself came down to Mexico to teach in the summer of 1926), and influenced, as well, by William Morris's and John Ruskin's ideas about craft, and their suspicion of exaggerated ornamentation. The arts—and popular indigenous arts in particular—were seen as an expression of authentic cultural identity and thus a basis for unifying the nation.[11] This approach, not surprisingly, emphasized the presence of pagan gods and rituals behind many of the Christian ceremonies—"idols behind the altars" is the phrase popularized by Anita Brenner in the title of her 1929 book.[12] Brenner borrowed the term directly from Gamio. This book, illustrated with photographs by Edward Weston and Tina Modotti, played an important role in the dissemination of Mexican art in the United States. It was also one of the texts on Mexico and its art read by Eisenstein before his arrival. What makes this book particularly noteworthy is that the national identity thus created was based on concepts of an exogenous provenance, both in terms of the structural position of the speaker vis-à-vis the object of research (from the impartial observations of the anthropologists), as well as in terms of the nationalities of these scholars, who were European (as is the case with most of the founding fathers of the discipline) or American (most of the archeological work done in Mexico in the postrevolutionary years was directed by the Carnegie Institute) or

who, as we have seen with Gamio, received their training abroad.[13] At the same time, most of the Mexican ideologues of this period were either primarily of criollo origins or educated in Europe or both, and some of the most active proponents of these new artistic movements were, indeed, European or American (most importantly, Jean Charlot, Katherine Anne Porter, Bertram and Ella Wolfe, and Anita Brenner). Thus the concept of indigenismo and Mexican nationalist state ideology were inseparable from trans-Atlantic anthropological developments of the early twentieth century. And as the revival of the traditional culture and the emphasis on the indigenous arts were part of the ethnological/anthropological platform, so was the inclusion of the arts and education as fundamental to the new national ideology. Indeed, some of the first institutions founded after the Mexican Revolution dealt with the study of anthropology and the arts. The most prominent examples of this were the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography and the International School of Archeology, lead by Gamio. But the state cultural policy in relation to the arts differed a great deal: while Vasconcelos supported the state patronage of (explicitly didactic) public artistic projects, such as the murals, Sáenz favored more liberal and populist didactic educational tools, such as open air chools.

The tension between these two strands in Mexican cultural policies of the 1920s and 1930s is reflected in Eisenstein's conception of Mexico, somewhat polarized between the universalist and the obviously modernist, somewhat echoing the "two Eisensteins"—the earlier "constructivist" and the later "organic"—as Eisenstein's friends in Mexico also belonged to Vasconcelos's generation (Montenegro and Best Maugard, and on the other end of the political spectrum, Siquieros) on the one hand, and the Gamio-Sáenz ideological position (Brenner and her circle) on the other. In fact, despite acute artistic and ideological debates raging throughout the 1920s and 1930s among the various groups, its members more often than not belonged to a shared social circle, sometimes changing sides (as is most obvious in the case of Rivera, who readily adapted his position for the changes in policies, and Katherine Anne Porter, who in the early 1920s was an active supporter of Vasconcelos's program, but who later grew increasingly disillusioned by it). The conflict between these two conceptions of culture and the exact role of the indigenous heritage in it is present in Eisenstein's own work, which (knowingly or unknowingly) synthesized these two positions, often blurring the distinctions between them, but as a result unintentionally breaking down the rigid and homogenizing systems of classifications we now employ in discussing modernism's engagement with "primitivism."[14]

VASCONCELOS AND THE ARTS: MONTENEGRO AND BEST MAUGARD

One of the earliest and most prominent supporters of Vasconcelos's cultural program was the painter Roberto Montenegro, who later became one of Eisenstein's friends and advisers during his stay in Mexico. Montenegro began his artistic career at the turn of the century with work done in an aestheticised postacademic "refined" style reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley. Like many others, his encounter with cubism in Paris changed his outlook on art, or, as he later put it, Picasso, Gris, Braque, and many others transformed his intentions and made him doubt his realist objectives. Having appropriated modernist (primarily postimpressionist and symbolist) styles, Montenegro, however, chose to remain within the figurative framework, but adding to it stylized non-Western details, which in Mexico meant incorporating traditional decorative, often regional and indigenous, elements. Upon his return to Mexico, he found a supporter in Vasconcelos, who inaugurated Montenegro's exhibit in June 1921. In the words of Olivier Debroise, "Montenegro offers in the early 1920s an idealized and idyllic image of a nation immensely rich in forms, in colors, in local traditions, in flowers and fruits, which satisfies the national pride of Jose Vasconcelos and of the many nostalgic neocolonialists."[15] From 1921 to the end of Vasconcelos's tenure in office in 1924, Montenegro and Adolfo Best Maugard were his closest allies and collaborators, involved in all of the various projects run by the ministry, especially in its support of the fine arts. Combined with Manuel Gamio's emphasis on "the indigenous as the Mexican," Montenegro and Best Maugard effectively headed the "movement for Mexican art," which fed the "Mexican Renaissance," in the phrase coined by Anita Brenner. It was Vasconcelos's office that began commissioning muralist paintings, which brought together many of the artists, young and established alike, who were the most radical proponents of the innovations in artistic form as well as in its relation to the society and the state. In 1923, Vasconcelos oversaw the publication of a short pamphlet, *El arte en la Rusia actual* (*Art in contemporary Russia*), with illustration by Montenegro, that exalted the educational platform of Lunacharsky and of Proletkult. At the same time, Montenegro engaged in two projects that typified and promoted the Mexican art movement: with Rivera, Siqueiros, Charlot, and Orozco, among others, he worked on the first mural projects commissioned by the state in the ex-convent of San Pedro and San Pablo and San Ildefonso College (*El antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso*), which in many ways visually embodied Vasconcelos's vision of the Mexican cosmic race; and he also

helped Katherine Anne Porter and Adolfo Best Maugard organize exhibits of Mexican popular arts. Meanwhile, in 1923, Anita Brenner returned to Mexico (her birthplace) and with her new friends, among them Charlot and Rivera, began her lifelong campaign to promote Mexican arts and the new Mexican culture in the U.S. A decade later, in 1930–31, this very same group of people happened to be gathered together in Mexico again. This group included some of the more ardent of Vasconcelos's supporters, many of whom (such as Best Maugard) recently, if temporarily, were returning to the country they'd left after Vasconcelos's fall from political power. They mixed with members of the Gamio-Sáenz camp, and they all individually played important roles in Eisenstein's project.

Adolfo Best Maugard, Montenegro's comrade in arms under Vasconcelos, was commissioned on January 16, 1931, by the Ministry of Education of Mexico to be the official "assistant" to Eisenstein's crew during the shooting of *¡Que Viva México!* Best Maugard was also paid by Upton Sinclair (via his brother-in-law, Hunter Kimbrough, who was part of the crew) to accompany Eisenstein everywhere. His role was complex: on the one hand, he was to make sure that Eisenstein was creating an image of Mexico that would be in accordance with (or at least not openly against) the wishes of the Mexican government. On the other hand, he served as the crew's interpreter and the provider of any information Eisenstein might require. Finally, he was to assure that the material in the film was "authentic."[16] This last function is perhaps best understood as a combination of the first two.

The choice of Best Maugard as censor and chaperone was, in fact, a stroke of luck for Eisenstein: Best Maugard was an artist and had a great deal of admiration for the Soviet director as well as an interest in Russian and Soviet art. During his stay in Paris in 1912–13, where he shared a studio with Roberto Montenegro, Best Maugard had become friendly with Diego Rivera and his first wife, Angelina Beloff. Beloff, who was Russian and a painter, introduced both Rivera and Best Maugard into Russian artistic circles, which included such lights as Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, whose return to Russian popular and religious motifs on the way to abstract expression greatly influenced the Mexican painters. Later, during the 1918 visit to Mexico of the famous Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova, Best Maugard worked with her on the costumes and stage sets, and provided her with information on the traditional dances of Mexico for the choreography of her ballet *Fantasia Mexicana*. In 1920, he was again invited by Pavlova to work on the sets for a new ballet to be staged in New York. Best Maugard was yet another student of Franz Boas, and became one of the leading figures behind the

Figure 1. Diego Rivera, *Portrait of Adolfo Best Maugard*, 1913. © 2008 Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust. Av. Cinco de Mayo No. 2, Col. Centro, Del. Cuauhtémoc 06059, México, D.F.

movement for reevaluating pre-Columbian art in Mexico. He played a very important role in the Mexican government of the early 1920s and its cultural program, serving as Vasconcelos's secretary during Vasconcelos's appointment as the Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924. Vasconcelos inaugurated a new section especially for Best Maugard—the Department

of Drawing and Manual Work (*Departamento de Dibujo y Trabajos Manuales*), which eventually became the foundation of the National Fine Arts Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes*). In 1921 Best Maugard was placed in charge of the staging of the national celebrations of Independence Day—"Mexican Night" in the main park of Mexico City, Chapultepec. The primary—and arguably the only—purpose of this mass spectacle was to reinforce the new national identity, which made heavy use of Aztec allegories.[17]

However, Best Maugard may be best known today for his several books that aligned arts education with a nationalistic program. His work was central to the project of contributing to the national revolutionary discourse through the arts: he was in charge of developing and implementing a method of teaching drawing to children using basic elements of pre-Columbian art, which became known as "El Método Best Maugard" or simply "el Método."[18] His ideas were summarized in the 1923 publication by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) of a book (practically a manual) called *Method of Drawing: Tradition, Revival, and Revolution of Mexican Art* (*Método de Dibujo: Tradición, resurgimiento y revolución del arte mexicano*). Between 1911 and 1920 he developed a system of "graphic grammar," a pictographic language that he described as incorporating the "essentials of the authentic pre-Columbian art." These elements were to be the basis for teaching Mexican children to draw in order to develop in them "in a systematic and codified manner an authentic national spirit."[19]

Best Maugard identified seven primary elements of all plastic arts—which are, in fact, lines or geometric shapes, including the spiral, the circle, the semicircle, the straight line, and the wavy line. These elements were extracted from Franz Boas's graphic analysis of the ornamental design of the ruins of Teotihuacan done in 1911, on which Best Maugard assisted. He then treated these elements as primary characters that allegedly corresponded to ancient Greek ones, but were specifically to be found in pre-Columbian indigenous art, "which later, subsuming European and Chinese elements, but not losing its own character and strength, formed colonial as well as contemporary popular arts."[20] The system combined a return to the archaic and primitive, a typical gesture of the European artistic avant-garde of the early century, to which Best Maugard felt himself connected, but with his own version of iconic and linguistic essentialism.[21] On the level of practice, this method worked very well with the overall postrevolutionary nationalist ideology of the state propounded by Vasconcelos and, to a lesser extent, Gamio: it provided a uniform language for creating and articulating an image of Mexican national art, and it had direct pedagogical

and didactic application. Although significantly modified in response to criticisms of its artificiality and superficiality after the end of Vasconcelos's period to accommodate the different cultural platform of his successor, Sáenz, Best Maugard's Método was still taught in schools nationwide for many years, and such famous Mexican artists as Rufino Tamayo and Miguel Covarrubias were perhaps his most successful students.[22]

In accord with Vasconcelos's esoteric universalism, in his writing Best Maugard not only emphasizes the national character of these primary elements, he stresses the universal archetypes out of which these figures emerge as man's attempt to "materialize his emotions and make a record of his imagining."[23] This formulation and the idea that lines themselves trace emotional and cognitive acts shared by all humans, and thus find their purest manifestation in the arts, especially in the primitive arts, resonates with Eisenstein's own ideas about sensual thinking and the line. Both represent an anthropologically evolutionary position, contrary to Boas's cultural relativism. Like Eisenstein, Best Maugard believed that all premodern cultures shared the same traits, and that those traits reemerge in works of art of the modern era. It is very likely that Best Maugard was directly influenced by theosophy and by Kandinsky's and Florensky's ideas, to which he was exposed in Paris. On the other hand, Best Maugard's "grammar" of primary elements is symptomatic of many such attempts, and certainly resonates with Eisenstein's own search (most evident in his notes). In fact, most of Best Maugard's elements, especially the spiral and the circle, appear in Eisenstein's notebooks from that period both in their pure form and as related to the architecture and images of both prehistorical and colonial art. Eisenstein does not seem to mention Best Maugard's name except in his drawings ("Fucking according to Best Maugard"), but it may be inferred, since it was Best Maugard's role (as he himself saw it) to "teach" the Soviet filmmaker about Mexico and especially about its indigenous culture, that Eisenstein's ideas of that time were inevitably filtered through Best Maugard's, at least as far as Mexico is concerned. By the 1930s, Best Maugard's cultural influence in Mexico waned, replaced by a different strand of the modernist worldview, more clearly associated with scientific developments and shifts in anthropological ideas, and more directly associated with the avant-garde (as opposed to, say, symbolism or impressionism). Eisenstein, famously nonsystematic in his philosophical quest, was sympathetic to both strands, which one can detect in his work on Mexico, just as it is possible to see both "early" and "late" Eisenstein sharing space in his Mexican project.

Some Mexican contemporaries who were part of Vasconcelos's circle emphasized Best Maugard's role in the making of the film. Agustín Aragón

Leiva, who was Best Maugard's assistant and became close to Eisenstein in Mexico (and was Eisenstein's ardent advocate during the scandal over the return of the material to Sinclair and its subsequent release in the U.S.), stated in his interview in *Todo* in October 1933 that: "Adolfo Best Maugard was his advisor, his mentor, his guide to his knowledge of Mexico. Best Maugard saved Eisenstein at least six months of research and the reading of several hundreds of books. The authentic Mexican element of the picture is basically due to Best Maugard."[24] Similarly, Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, another Mexican painter who knew Eisenstein in Mexico, in an unpublished tribute to Eisenstein claims that: "The Secretary of State commissioned the painter Adolfo Best Maugard to be the guide in his travels around the country, serving as his interpreter and to orient him in terms of the authenticity of our life. Best Maugard was a valuable element for the Russian filmmaker, and it is undoubtedly to some extent that the interesting form of the coordination and the structure of the story and its contrasting matrix of the themes of the libretto owes itself to Best Maugard."[25]

These claims that Best Maugard played an active role in shaping the stories behind the libretto, however, are undoubtedly an exaggeration: as we know from Kimbrough's letter to Sinclair of January 12, 1931, Best Maugard also suggested his own version of what Eisenstein's film should be like.

> He suggests using an old Mexican ballad or song that is well known here, as a basis of the story. The hero of the song is a handsome, courageous, adventurous Don Juan. He has many love affairs and drinks and fights. He gets into trouble everywhere he goes and is forced to flee to other sections, either by the police or by his rivals in love. He is educated and mixes in the best and worst of society. He is romantic and a little artistic. Likes songs, women, travel, adventure, and scenic beauty. But due to his recklessness he is constantly in trouble and forced to move on quickly.
>
> I like Dr. Best's suggestion. He says THAT is really Mexican. He is Mexican himself.[26]

The only part of this suggestion that might have anything to do with the libretto (as Eisenstein referred to the script) of *¡Que Viva México!* is the intended use of folk songs as one of the structuring principles of the narrative: "Sandunga" is a wedding song from Oaxaca, and the plot of the episode "*Soldadera*" (the one episode that was never shot) was meant to be loosely based on the famous revolutionary song *La Adelita*. There was also a subplot in the "Fiesta" section that was meant to focus on the

young picador and his adulterous affair: the husband finds his wife in the arms of the picador and draws an ornate Spanish pistol. As he is about to fire the weapon, the lovers escape death by a "pure miracle," which is left unspecified in the published scenario. In the genre of popular religious legends, Eisenstein subsequently explained, the lover is transformed into an old painted crucifix such as those found in Mexico's baroque churches. In a satirical twist, the jealous husband then drops his pistol in order to kneel down and pray before the cross.[27] We see similar images (rendered in sexually cruder and more obviously homoerotic terms) among Eisenstein's infamous "pornographic" drawings from that period.

This ironic episode—which, however, does not appear in most versions of the screenplay, subsumed by the spectacle of the bullfight itself, which Eisenstein found much more interesting to work with—may be attributed to Best Maugard's suggestion. But more noteworthy is the parallel between Best Maugard's favored artistic themes (the linking of the biological and the cultural, physiology and art, and the air of quasimystical universalism around them) and Eisenstein's own movement towards a similar frame of reference. This convergence between Best Maugard's and Eisenstein's ideas emerges clearly in the choice of filmic locations that correspond to the way the iconography of the Mexican Revolution based itself on figures extracted from the authentic pre-Columbian past, clearly at Best Maugard's and Rivera's suggestion.

Eisenstein's own interest in what can be seen as analogous to the Mexican concept of indigenismo was through his exploration of what he termed "sensuous" or "prelogical" thinking.

PRELOGICAL THINKING

Under the influence of anthropological theories of the early twentieth century, most notably those developed by Lucien Levy-Bruhl, Eisenstein postulated that the prelogical stage of culture preceded more technologically advanced cultures. Eisenstein read Levy-Bruhl's *La mentalité primitive* (originally published in 1922) in Paris before his trip to the United States. To no small degree, his interest in Mexico's pre-Columbian past arose from these readings. It is worth noting that Levy-Bruhl's evolutionist concepts were part of a polemic with Franz Boas's cultural relativism. Eisenstein's exposure to both (although we have no evidence that he read Boas, he was certainly exposed to his ideas via Anita Brenner and Best Maugard, who were both Boas's students) resulted in his somewhat inconsistent anti-evolutionarist take on Levy-Bruhl, to which we will turn in the last chapter of this book.

Levy-Bruhl theorized that primitive societies developed collective prelogical mental structures, which were manifested particularly in religion. These structures, in which the principle of noncontradiction is not recognized, are seen as basic universal principles enabling human cognition and manifesting themselves in particular through mythological (primitive, sensual) thinking. In such thinking, contradictory descriptions or events in a narrative sequence do not exclude each other. Like the structural principle of dreams in Freudian theory, in which the negation does not exist, prelogical thinking refuses to obey the law of identity. And derived from this fact is Levy-Bruhl's "law of participation," in which the primitive mind represents reality as a community of forces held together by mysterious and unquantifiable pathways of influence: "I should be inclined to say that in the collective representations of primitive mentality, objects, beings and phenomena can be (though in a way incomprehensible to us) both themselves and other than themselves. In a fashion which is no less incomprehensible, they give forth and receive mystic powers, virtues, qualities and influences, which make themselves felt outside, without ceasing to remain where they are."[28]

Eisenstein would have come upon similar systems of identification in the texts he used to understand Mexico. In *Idols Behind Altars*, for instance, Anita Brenner, speaking of the link between rituals, seasons, and the growing of crops, writes: "The Zapotec on the east coast, and the Maya, and many another Indian, considers new-born children to have an animal counterpart. Death or injury to one means death or injury to the other. 'My soul is a jaguar,' he says. And here is a contemporary key to much ancient poetry. The Aztecs made of this belief an idenfication of each person's fate with an animal which was the calendrical sign of the day of his birth; which identification is no longer a literal belief so much as a mascot, a symbol, a name."[29]

The synthesis of this outline of the principles behind mythological thinking with the modern, logical consciousness can be achieved dialectically, according to Eisenstein, through an ecstatic experience, and is at the core of any work of art. While this specific formulation was not given by Eisenstein until the post-Mexican 1930s and 1940s work on the collection tentatively entitled *Method* (*Metod*), the shift toward making prelogical or sensual thinking central to his work took place in Mexico.[30]

In the essay "Dvizhenie myshleniia," finished in 1943, which deals specifically with prelogical, sensual consciousness, Eisenstein outlines the movement of his own thinking on this issue. He traces it from Paris, where he found Levy-Bruhl's *La Mentalite Primitive*, to Hollywood, where immediately prior to his departure for Mexico he managed to buy all

twelve volumes of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and on to Mexico itself: "It is here that I come to know the fantastic structure of prelogical, sensuous thinking—not only from the pages of anthropological investigations but from daily communion with those descendants of the Aztecs and Toltecs, Mayas, or Huichole who have managed to carry unharmed through the ages that meandering thought. It determined the astonishing traits of that miracle of Mexican primitive culture, as its tribes to this day stand beside the cradle of a cultural era that has not yet begun for them."[31] Among the sources that led Eisenstein toward the investigation of prelogical consciousness, he mentions various early works of cultural anthropology, including the writings of Humboldt, who had visited Mexico in 1799–1804, and whom Eisenstein also mentions in "Dvizhenie myshleniia." Along with these sources, Eisenstein also relied, of course, on his own impressions of Mexico, its people, and its art.

The qualities that Eisenstein associates with the premodern are fully reflected in his "Prologue." Of particular importance to Eisenstein in this regard were the mythical circular structure of time and the sensuous aspects of prelogical consciousness, opposing both to the modern counterpart of historical progress and logical thinking. Contrary to Eisenstein's explicit emphasis on the revolutionary potential of such regress, my reading would imply that in the film Eisenstein in effect attempts to reconstruct the distant past, and in this way return to the originary totality. As we have seen, this is mirrored by similar projects being undertaken in the Mexican cultural agenda of the time.

As my analysis of the "Prologue" will show, although we can see a certain predominance of Eisenstein's new understanding of totality in organic rather than constructivist terms (especially as it is manifested in the circular mythical structure of the film), this model depends on the dialectical shift that is intended to mediate between the mythological past and the revolutionary present of Mexico. Therefore, in spite of the emphasis on the organic and the circular time structure and the use of similar metaphors, Eisenstein's artistic method of the Mexican period still includes the modern as that which contains intimations of the revolution. This whole structure depends on the coexistence—and the conflict—of both, the archaic and the ultramodern (i.e., the technological advances and revolutionary political ideology). The importance of the modern for Eisenstein is evident even from such comments as "the struggle of progress is still very real [in Mexico]," that cultures in Mexico are "violently contrasting," and "the contrasting independent adjacency . . . is taken as the motif for constructing the film."[32] This notion may contradict a rather strong assertion from Bulgakowa that "in the

1930s . . . discontinuity, fragmentation, and stimulus disappear, as do all traces of constructivism and of the modern."[33] Although the modern may be disguised in the "Prologue" to *¡Que Viva México!* it nonetheless exists as a very strong intertext to the film. The relation of Siquieros's mural *The Death of a Sacrificed Worker* to the Maya burial scene in the "Prologue" is perhaps the best example of this phenomenon.

READING THE "PROLOGUE"

A close reading of a film can be seen as both its murder (pulling it apart into small pieces, freezing the image in an attempt to bring it closer in order to obtain knowledge of it, but simultaneously denying it precisely that which gives it reality—its movement and existence in time), and a hopeless exercise in desire (no matter how hard you try to break everything down, you are left with a feeling that some essence has escaped you). What happens, then, when a film itself exists only in fragments and stills? In some sense, the logic is reversed: the analysis of the film becomes a way to bring it back to life, in the sense of making it whole, a process that mimics that of the work of the director himself. In the case of *¡Que Viva México!* this dialectic is thematized in the film, and in particular in its "Prologue" and "Epilogue," through constant reversals of death and life and the emphasis on this process as continuous. This projection of the poetics of the film onto the poetics of the artistic process (and back) is particularly justified in the case of Eisenstein. As Mikhail Iampolskii observes, "In 'Psychology of Composition' Eisenstein developed in detail the metaphor of authorial self-analysis (to which he constantly subjected himself) as autopsy, as the dissection of the corpse."[34] While this is particularly the case with his epistolary and theoretical writing from this period, as we shall have a chance to observe more closely in the following chapters, this metaphor holds true for Eisenstein's films as well. This dissection, however, remains only the first, initial part of the process, ultimately leading to artistic creation. We witness a realization of this metaphor when we examine the shots of the Maya burial, where the camera, as it were, dissects the body in the casket through a series of shots, only to bring more dynamism to this sequence that forms a central part of the "Prologue."

Moreover, out of what Christian Metz famously calls "the five matters of expression of talking cinema," there is only one that is available to us for analysis of *¡Que Viva México!*—the moving photographic image. In the "Prologue," well over half of the film is technically moving photographic image and not stills. Nevertheless, because it consists primarily of

static shots, this material lends itself with less resistance to a close analysis, making the inevitable interruption of the temporal flow of the film less violent. Since the shots are static, one does not disrupt the temporal dimension by freezing the frame, but merely by changing the duration of each image. It is for all these reasons, as well as to further my overall analysis, that a close reading of the "Prologue" is not only necessary but also slightly more feasible—especially when otherwise faced with closely reading all two hundred thousand feet of footage.

"PROLOGUE" AS PREHISTORY: A READING

In this reading, I would first like to isolate the basic elements that serve as axes for my analysis. These axes are: the composition of the frame, the distance of the objects from the camera (close-up, medium shot, and so on), whether the objects in the frame move or are static, whether the frame itself is mobile (i.e., whether there is camera movement), duration of the image (how long the shot lasts), and the direction of the eye line (whether the character's gaze is directed at a particular object; into the offscreen space; into the camera; or inward, that is, eyes closed or significantly lowered). Since it is impossible to be absolutely sure of Eisenstein's intended editing, the grouping of shots and images based on these parameters into semantic clusters will ultimately shape the interpretation of this sequence.

The "Prologue," and thus the film, begins with a series of static shots, alternating between long shots of the Maya pyramids and ruins and close-ups of the ornamental details. The long shots of the pyramids emphasize the triangular composition of the frame characteristic of shots throughout the film, with the diametrically placed lines and shadows. A good example of this is the way that in one of the shots of the pyramid, the palm tree branch blocks or cuts off the corner of the frame, breaking the frame into several triangles. The monumentality of these shots is further achieved by low angle and the use of the 28 mm wide lens, which Eisenstein had only used once before and which he would again employ in *Bezhin Meadow, Alexander Nevsky*, and *Ivan the Terrible* to similar effect. This monumentality is matched by the expansion of the profilmic space (as James Goodwin notes in his book *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*[35]) in the external shots of the pyramids and ruins, producing the effect of not only carefully constructed frames, but also a vast space outside of the frame. The profiles of indigenous Mexicans are juxtaposed with the faces carved on the stone ruins. People themselves appear petrified, as if mimicking the stone images, immobile, with fixed gaze. The ruins are

Figure 2. Image from the "Prologue." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

the images of the past in the present, or even, to use Eisenstein's own words in the film's libretto, "the past prevailing over the present."[36] The ruins are presented as structures of permanence, a permanence then further emphasized by the resemblance between the stone carvings and the figures of the Indians whose bodies, and more specifically faces, become the sites displaying the continuity of time. This is a realm where history cannot exist because there is no change; no history but rather a permanent prehistory hovering over the present. No change here also means no movement: almost all of the shots are static.

The next series of shots are static frontal close-ups moving from medium close-ups to close-ups to extreme close-ups of the stone figures of Aztec and Maya gods. The monumentalism of the shots of the pyramids and ruins is matched by the excessive detail and ornamentation of these figures. From frontal close-ups of gods we move to identically constructed shots of women. The only close-ups (and extreme close-ups) in this section are of the gods, of women, and of the dead man in the funeral procession. The women's eyes are lowered or closed, making the resemblance between them and the stone faces even more striking. For the Mexican audience, the stone figures of gods are quite identifiable: most of them are ancient goddesses associated with death and destruction. This is the first entrance of the "Awesome Mother of Gods,"

Figure 3. Coatlicue. Olivier Debroise collection, Mexico City.

Coatlicue, who becomes an important figure in "Fiesta," another episode in *¡Que Viva México!* These extreme close-ups of stone gods and of women frame the structural and thematic center of the "Prologue," a Maya funeral procession. Thus at the very start of the film, women are associated through this semantic cluster with death, both through an identical

construction of shots with those of the deathly gods, and by the framing of the funeral scene.

PRE-HISPANIC GODS

We know from Eisenstein's correspondence as well as from his notes that he was extremely interested in pre-Columbian Mexican mythology and studied it at great length during his stay in Mexico. While in Mexico City he spent several days in Museo Nacional (now Museum of Anthropology), where many statues of Aztec gods were on display; Eisenstein dutifully copied all the information about them into his notebook. As we have mentioned above, Eisenstein brought a set of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* with him to Mexico; he was also reading Spence's *The Myths of Mexico and Peru*. Eisenstein was fascinated by the duality of life and death in the representation of the mythological deities in pre-Columbian Mexico. His film project coincided with a period in which interest in the indigenous cultures in Mexico was rising, due to the greater amount of information and more sophisticated interpretations of archaeological and ethnological evidence in the 1910s though 1930s. Within that twenty-year span, some of the most important archeological and anthropological explorations in Mexico took place, starting with the archeological digs led by Franz Boas in Teotihuacan in 1911. The discoveries made at that time were naturally regarded with great interest among the intellectual and artistic circles of Mexico, given the official bias towards incorporating the indigenous into the sweep of Mexican history. The information about the pre-Hispanic myths and rituals that was of particular interest to Eisenstein at that time because of its resonance with his own emerging theories came from a variety of sources: from the books of Western anthropologists, such as Frazer; through the oral accounts of his Mexican acquaintances (especially Rivera and Best Maugard); and from his visits to the actual archeological sites and museums all over the country. Eisenstein was also impressed by the everyday use of ancient mythology and culture in contemporary Mexican culture arts (e.g., Posada's prints, the murals, popular arts and crafts). The one text that most influenced his perception of Mexican pre-Columbian art in relation to its contemporary culture was probably Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars*. Divided in three parts corresponding to the great periods in Mexican art—pre-Hispanic, colonial, and modern—the book gives a popular anthropological account of the landscape, the people, the customs, and traditions, as well as of the legends and beliefs of the pre-Hispanic Mexican civilizations, their rituals, and deities, paying particular attention to rites and sacrifices and the treatment of death.

Anita Brenner deserves a separate introduction due to her importance as both the author of *Idols Behind Altars* (as well as other important works on Mexico) and as Eisenstein's interlocutor for much of his stay in Mexico, where she functioned as a kind of center of gravity for many of the artists and intellectuals with whom Eisenstein came into contact in Mexico. Her importance in the cultural scene of Mexico of the 1920s and 1930s had been largely overlooked until recently, when her daughter's detailed biography of Anita Brenner's life, as well as a collection of articles, began to appear both in English and Spanish. These books, along with other scattered facts of Brenner's involvement in the Mexican scene, provide the reader with information on her fascinating life, making sense of many of the connections between the avant-garde circles in Mexico, New York, and LA, as well as Paris and, ultimately, Moscow.[37]

Born of Jewish American parents of Latvian origin in Aguacalientes (Mexico), Brenner became one of the most important and effective promoters of Mexican culture abroad. Upon her return to Mexico in 1923 (in large part because of not feeling accepted in Texas, where she grew up, being Mexican and Jewish), on the eve of Vasconcelos's cultural reforms, the eighteen-year-old Anita Brenner became friends with Frances Toor, the creator and editor of *Mexican Folkways*, an English-Spanish travel magazine. Published in Mexico between 1925 and 1937, the magazine was devoted to the traditional arts of Mexico, with a particular focus on Mexican indigenous arts and featuring contributions from Rivera, Modotti, and others. The magazine was intended largely for the U.S. audience and in many ways it crystallized and gave form to the emerging trends of the Mexican artistic movement of the time while also bringing international attention to it. In the words of Frances Toor, by 1932, *Mexican Folkways* "played an important part in the formation of the new Mexican attitude toward the Indian by making known his customs and art; and for the same reason the magazine had an important influence on the modern art movement."[38] In 1929, at the astonishingly precocious age of twenty-four, Anita Brenner published *Idols Behind Altars*, which included photographs by Weston and Modotti. It was only then that she enrolled in the doctoral program in anthropology at Columbia, under the supervision of Franz Boas. We shall return to Anita Brenner in other contexts in chapters 2 and 3, and in any case this is not the place to thoroughly discuss—and critique—Brenner's approach to Mexico.[39] Suffice it is to say at this point that this approach corresponded remarkably well to Eisenstein's own ideas and understanding of Mexico, its art, and of art in general. Brenner herself became, upon her return to Mexico on her honeymoon in 1930, one of Eisenstein's favorite conversation partners in

Mexico. It is evident that the choice of the pre-Columbian deities in the "Prologue" was a result of Eisenstein's dialogue with Brenner and Best Maugard, among others.

In his letters to his friend, the actor Maxim Shtraukh, Eisenstein makes direct references to a series of Mexican deities, demonstrating a high level of familiarity with the subject, and "sadistic" pre-Columbian rituals, noting that they had triggered his theoretical work.[40]

What perhaps interested Eisenstein most was his belief that ancient Mexican cosmology, as any traditional agricultural worldview, is marked by a mythological or circular perception of time and history. The circularity of life and death in ancient Mexican cultures—as in most premodern agrarian cultures—is tied to the agricultural life-order and what is now termed a "mythological" or circular perception of time and history: death is always linked to rebirth, as in the natural life cycle. The worship of death marks the ceremonial calendar of the Aztecs, for example. Out of eighteen ritualistic celebrations in accordance with the Aztec calendar, four are devoted to the offerings to the dead.

In the Maya and Aztec religions, the circularity and inseparability of life and death, of birth and destruction, are best illustrated by the female deities, who are central to the cosmology. The image of a goddess is always dual: she is always a nurturing mother, the origin of life, the beginning, but also the origin of destruction and death. The apocalyptical aspect is very strong in the Aztec worldview: according to the Aztec calendar, not only do each of the four ages of the world end with a terrible catastrophe, but the end of each calendar division of fifty-two years is a time of doom, when the end of the world is expected with terror and chastisements, and the continuation of life is celebrated as a miracle and rebirth.[41] The origin of this destruction is almost always linked to a female deity who brings it about. So, in pre-Columbian Mexican religions the goddess is not only the traditional symbol of birth and fertility but simultaneously (and equally importantly) the symbol of death and destruction. *Coatlicue*, the Aztec goddess of earth and fertility, symbolizes at once the matrix of all the living and the skull of death. The Maya goddess *Itzamana* follows the same principle. She embodies the principle of opposites: of life and death, but also of the masculine and the feminine. The primordial Maya gods, the originators of life, are uroboric and bisexual.[42] One is designated as male (*Ometecuhtli*) and the other as female (*Omecihuatl*), but both possess equal (which is to say independent and self-sufficient) reproductive organs.[43] Visually, the goddess is usually endowed with phallic symbols and is either giving birth or devouring a male deity. In the words of Mexican anthropologist Félix Báez-Jorge,

"Corn for the pre-Hispanic cosmologies was the flesh of men, usually represented by a young man whose body as it is buried becomes the sacred plant, thus death is almost always a sign of creation."[44] The great goddess bears life, the corn, which may appear as a phallic corn god or as the son of the corn. She also bears death, emblematized by the obsidian knife that she holds. This twofold aspect, in which life becomes death and death life, and in which the one depends on the other, recurs again and again in Aztec myths and rituals.[45]

The womb of earth (which is lifegiving) also becomes the deadly devouring maw of the underworld, thus linking the womb and the tomb—the beginning and the end. The god or goddess of corn (as represented by *Centeotl*) is buried; s/he dies in order to be reborn.[46] Abundant food offerings, as well as dancing and drinking, constituted many Aztec ceremonies celebrating death. Skulls were the symbols of these rituals because according to one of the myths of creation, men were made out of the bones that Quetzalcoatl gathered in the underworld: the goddess of the earth ground them and then Quetzalcoatl bound the dust made of bones with the blood drawn from his virile member.[47]

In accordance with these ancient pre-Hispanic conceptions that he read about so much, Eisenstein structures the "Prologue" so that death is mediated by the figure of women. The close-ups of women and gods are then followed by a close-up of a dead man in an open coffin. The similarity among these shots is not only in their construction (frontal close-ups), but also in one particularly striking detail: the graphic match between the empty eyes of the stone figures, the lowered eyes of the women, and the closed eyes of the dead man. Unlike the usual eye-match structure, the absent or inward gaze adds to the uncanny effect of these images: the viewer becomes aware of the transgressiveness of one's own gaze. Just as the vision of the figures on the screen is directed into a realm that is neither onscreen nor offscreen, but can only be understood as being outside representation, the audience's own gaze is neither returned nor redirected. We are, after all, breaking the most basic taboos by gazing directly at gods and at death itself.

The funeral-procession sequence consists of two parts—the procession itself and a ritualistic feast that forms it. The latter is filmed in static shots composed much like the preceding sequence. The main difference, however, is that instead of one or two frontal takes from different distances (a close-up and an extreme close-up, for example), the composition of the visual planes changes to a kind of establishing shot of a half-open coffin showing the face of the dead with three men and three women positioned symmetrically on the sides of the coffin with *jicaras*, half-cut

Figure 4. Xochipilli. Olivier Debroise collection, Mexico City.

gourds serving as receptacles for drink or for keeping liquids placed on the coffin in front of them. This reference to the ritualistic feasts often accompanying pre-Columbian burials and sacrifice rites reflects the story of the burial of the god or goddess of corn (as represented by *Centeotl*, as we have already seen). In the "Prologue," the image of this young man in a coffin, upon which plates are placed, is almost certainly also

a reference to a god of corn, whose flesh is to be eventually devoured. This feast is ironically mirrored in the "Epilogue," where children are eating sugar coffins in a cemetery during the celebration of the Day of the Dead, a shot constructed visually to remind the viewer of the scene in the "Prologue." This image of the dead man in the coffin is then broken into various planes, producing a series of shots that, when looked at together,

Figure 5. Image from the "Prologue." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

Figure 6. Sergei M. Eisenstein and Grigori Alexandrov shooting the burial of the peon, near Izamal, Yucatán, April 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

follow the structure of a cubist painting. Although the shots themselves are static, their multiplicity appears to give an illusion of movement and varying perspectives that brings this image to life, while simultaneously performing a kind of a dissection of the shot, breaking it into fragments. The body in the coffin is subjected to dissection by means of an almost perfect geometrical breakdown of the image into a series of shots from just about every possible angle in what looks like (potentially, since the sequence was never edited by Eisenstein himself) a montage sequence reminiscent of the opening sequence of *October*. This is then followed by the only moving sequence in this section of the film: the funeral procession.

THE FUNERAL PROCESSION

The sudden introduction of movement is startling: not only is there movement in the frame (as six men slowly carry an open coffin) but the camera is moving too, forming tracking shots of significantly longer duration than all the previous ones. As the six men carry the coffin through cactus-covered terrain, groups of women stand in completely static poses, sometimes in the same shot as the men and the coffin, sometimes in a separate shot, facing the direction of the funeral procession. This direction seems completely unmotivated; it is unclear where the procession began

Figure 7. Shooting the burial of the peon in an agave field near Izamal, April 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

or where it is going, and there is one shot in which the consistency of the screen direction is altered (instead of moving from left to right, the procession seems to be going from right to left). In these sequences women mark the direction of the movement, their faces, in separate shots, pointing and indicating the direction, almost motivating it (as in some cases their medium close-ups precede the moving shots) by looking into the offscreen space. This designates women as static and associates men with mobility (a fairly common phenomenon in film), but what is much more interesting is the association of the movement and the progression, as a narrative otherwise enclosed by a series of static shots into a circular structure, with death. This is paradoxical since figural death falls outside the boundaries of narrative time and hence any temporal progression, implying permanence and therefore lack of movement and change. In a medium that gives an illusion of life primarily through movement, the association of movement and narrative with death is particularly striking.

While the series of shots of the Aztec and Maya gods, and, by formal association, women, represent death in its most abstract, iconic form, the dead man in the funeral sequence is relatively concretized: he is not an icon but an instantiation and a figure of death. And while the previous shots could hardly be seen as producing a narrative, but rather stand as icons of timelessness, the funeral procession introduces some sense of

temporality and therefore becomes a narrative by virtue of the double movement of the camera and of the objects in the frame. But if it is a narrative, it is one that is indecipherable to us: it is pure movement of time within the realm of timelessness.

The best way to illustrate the ahistoricity and mythological status of this depiction is by comparing and contrasting it to a similar scene in another of Eisenstein's films. His next, also unfinished film, *Bezhin Meadow* (*Bezhin Lug*, 1935), begins with another funeral procession, that of the mother of the main protagonist, Stepka. She was beaten to death by her husband in a story of collectivization in the Russian countryside.[48] The death of Stepka's mother is the prehistory of the narrative of *Bezhin Meadow*; the event of her death in many ways sets in motion the events of the film. The mother's body then belongs to history, that of the narrative of the film, and through it to the history of the Stalinist modernization of Russia. Her body also has its own history in the film, its own story to tell, a story of domestic violence and abuse. Unlike the opening of *Bezhin Meadow*, then, the "Prologue" in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* operates on the level of mythological time. The nameless Maya man's story is not *apparently* known to us, his death is not inscribed in historical terms and is thus abstract in comparison to the death of Stepka's mother in *Bezhin Meadow*.

But it is only through the reading of the "Prologue" together with its intertext that yet another level of concreteness emerges: the mythological Indian from the funeral procession actually does have a name and a history. His name is Felipe Carrillo Puerto, and he was a socialist governor of Yucatán (the exact location where the "Prologue" takes place), assassinated in 1924 and allegedly commemorated in David Alfaro Siqueiros's mural *The Burial of a Sacrificed Worker* (1924). Eisenstein was so impressed with the mural that he modeled his Maya burial sequence in the "Prologue" on it, a fact evident from a visual comparison of the images (this emerges particularly clearly in the footage of Jay Leyda's study of the film). The "Prologue" was meant to begin with a dedication to Siqueiros, making the link between the mural and the Maya funeral procession even more obvious. This example of an intertextual reading demonstrates not only how the interpretation of an image from this film can change dramatically based on its historical context, but also how the visual text of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* is the product of an extensive dialogue between Eisenstein and Mexican artists of the period.

We can now consider in more detail the ways in which the film, and the "Prologue" in particular, relate to the postrevolutionary ideology of the Mexican state.

Figure 8. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Entierro de un obrero*, 1923–24. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SOMAAP, Mexico City.

Figure 9. Image from the "Prologue." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

THE DEATH OF A SACRIFICED WORKER

The Death of a Sacrificed Worker (a.k.a. *The Burial of a Sacrificed Worker*) is one of Siqueiros's early murals, from the *Colegio de San Idelfonso* (1921–26). In it, Siqueiros depicts the burial of a Communist worker, complete with star and sickle on his coffin. The mural was painted in 1923, prior to Carrillo Puerto's assassination, and was intended to be a political metaphor for the confrontation of labor with the class system, another version of which—*La liberación del peón* (*Death of the Peon*)—was done by Rivera for La Secretaria de Educación Pública (SEP). However, following the destruction of the mural (for its explicit political message) and the assassination of the Socialist governor of Yucatán in 1924, the mural came to be seen by many as a commemoration of that event. Felipe Carrillo Puerto was a Socialist, known for his support of the rights of the indigenous people and women's suffrage as well as land reforms. He had been involved with Alma Reed, John Reed's sister, who subsequently became one of Anita Brenner's close friends and collaborators in promoting Mexican art in the U.S., proving to be particularly instrumental in Orozco's career. Thus while Siqueiros's mural was not intended to have a direct historical referent, it acquired one by association. The composition of the mural itself was, according to Siquieros's own claim in his autobiography, influenced by a sequence in *Strike*—although there are very good reasons to suspect that this is, in fact, an anachronistic reading, and that Siqueiros, although extremely interested in Eisenstein's montage theory, had not seen any of his films by that point. Eisenstein and Siqueiros, of course, did meet in January 1931 in Taxco, in the house of Moisés Sáenz, who followed Vasconcelos as a subsecretary of the Ministry of Education in charge of indigenous affairs. Sáenz's house in 1930–31 became an important center of cosmopolitan exchanges with regular guests like Malcolm and Peggy Cowley, Hart Crane, and Katherine Anne Porter. Siqueiros was in political exile (so-called forced residence) in Taxco at that time, following his eight-month imprisonment in Mexico City the year before.[49] Eisenstein later recorded his impressions of Siqueiros and his art in the essay "The Prometheus of Mexican Painting," which he began writing in Mexico. They met again just days before Eisenstein left Mexico for good, at an exhibit organized by Anita Brenner, where Eisenstein was an inaugural speaker. Siqueiros's own encounter with Eisenstein's ideas, in particular in relation to vertical and horizontal planes of organization of the frame (explored by Eisenstein in his essay "The Dynamic Square," written during his stay in Mexico), proved to be extremely productive. In an essay entitled "Los vehículos de la pintura dialéctico-subversiva," which

he worked on exactly at the time of his meeting Eisenstein in Taxco, Siqueiros extended Eisenstein's montage principles to mural painting.[50] The essay—essentially a manifesto for Siqueiros's mural painting—was originally intended for publication in 1932 by Seymour Stern's journal *Experimental Cinema* (in which some of the first images from *¡Que Viva Mexico!* appeared in 1930 along with one of the librettos), but before that date *Experimental Cinema* ceased to exist, as a result of which the essay was never published. The draft of the article among Stern's papers begins with a dedication from Siqueiros: "with admiration to Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein."[51] The title of Siqueiros's essay—"The means of the dialectically subversive painting"—takes us back to Eisenstein's use of Siqueiros's mural.

It is only through this juxtaposition of the two images—of Siqueiros's mural and the Maya burial sequence from the "Prologue"—that Eisenstein's representation of history in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* can come to life—not merely as an ethnographic documentary and a record of ancient traditions and rituals still alive in contemporary Mexico, but as a historical and dialectical engagement with the material, in particular through the coexistence of temporal moments that fascinated Eisenstein in Mexico, the co-presence of an authentic past and a revolutionary present, which seem to mutually interpenetrate each other. The interplay of the two artistic images—the Maya burial in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* and Siqueiros's mural—is remarkable. Siqueiros's mural, like Eisenstein's film, was never completed (for political reasons, as it was too openly pro-Communist). Regardless of whether Siqueiros modeled his mural after Eisenstein, it is both well documented and visually evident that Eisenstein modeled his scene on Siqueiros's mural.

Yuri Tsivian has coined the term "cultural reflex" to designate the way Eisenstein reads his influences through images—for instance, the way that Siqueiros's text was to be read through the images in the "Prologue," or the way hidden references throughout the film *Ivan the Terrible* serve as a framework for how to read particular scenes. The cultural reflex, according to Tsivian, works much like the earlier theory of reflexes in Eisenstein: "The film director could arouse . . . 'unconditioned' reflex and deflect the ensuing emotion onto something else. . . . *Ivan* works the same way, the only difference being that in his early films Eisenstein preferred to work with physiological stimuli, whereas in *Ivan* he counts on our responses to culture."[52] This response, however, is not universal, unlike the physiological one, but is instead culturally determined. Because Siqueiros's mural would have been familiar to all Mexicans, perhaps to a few Americans, but most certainly not to the Soviet audience, the meaning of this scene

would also remain largely inaccessible to audiences outside of Mexico. But aside from this consideration, an even more serious problem remains: even in spite of the reading together of the revolutionary potential of Siqueiros's image and the premodern, prelogical possibilities of the Maya burial, what seems to emerge is not so much a dialectical synthesis of antiquity and modernity as a subsumption of history by mythology. This is not an altogether unfamiliar phenomenon, which is certainly not ideologically innocent in the context of both Soviet and Mexican postrevolutionary cultures, where the revolution itself immediately entered the domain of mythological representation to legitimate the establishment of a postrevolutionary governing class.

The coexistence of the different temporalities that is crucial for Eisenstein in terms of its dialectical potential can be explored not only in the way that the sequence from the "Prologue," with its mythological time, collides with the radical content of Siqueiros's mural, but these conflicting temporalities are also present on the level of the narrative of the entire film. I will argue in the course of this book that the intended narrative of the film is not that of an "eternal circle," as suggested by many scholars, but rather a spiral, where the "Prologue" comes to life, as it were, in the "Epilogue," realizing the revolutionary potential of the past and producing the dialectical shift onto a utopian future. The fact that Eisenstein so heavily relies on the figure of the indigenous in the film, then, needs to be a seen as a particular instantiation of the modernist fascination with "the primitive" as a utopian figure—one that does not merely advocate the return to a premodern plentitude and harmony, but instead has politically charged associations when examined in the context of Mexican cultural history. I will turn to a more detailed discussion of this issue in the next chapter, while also linking "the primitive" to representation of femininity in Eisenstein, as is particularly evident in the novella "Sandunga." The questions raised by the political use of mythology move us towards distinguishing between a superficial way of treating that mythology and a deeper surrender to it—the latter being characterized by taking seriously the idea of prelogical time.

2

"SANDUNGA"

It has been a little difficult to get the natives to pose before the camera because it is a new thing to them and they are not sure whether it is modest or not. The first day we were threatened by a group of men who said our cameras were machines that enabled us to look through women's clothes. We had to leave. . . . For two pesos apiece the reception committee of older women finally consented to pose and carry on their ceremony of painting letters on the faces of male guests. We got good shots of this but nothing else. —LETTER FROM HUNTER KIMBROUGH TO UPTON SINCLAIR, February 15, 1931, Tehuantepec, Mexico[1]

The method of art as the model for the social ideal at all times (classlessness as the highest "forward" and the deepest "back"). The synthesis of the logical formula and the prelogical form, i.e. the highest point of the progress of consciousness—the reflection of contemporary (for each moment) stage of the social development, and prelogic, reflecting always and in all cases the same—pre-class stage. —SERGEI EISENSTEIN'S NOTEBOOKS, December 5, 1936[2]

Eisenstein has taken these primitive people and glorified them with his imagination. —UPTON SINCLAIR, August 7, 1931[3]

¡Que Viva México!'s first novella, "Sandunga," takes up the theme of a pre-Columbian utopian past introduced in the "Prologue," and, like the "Prologue," suspends the time of the incidents it shows, situating them

Figure 10. Eduard Tisse in Tehuantepec, January–March 1931. Olivier Debroise collection, Mexico City.

between an unspecified past and the present day. This temporal bifurcation allows the tale unfolding on the screen to pursue a double logic—on the content side, the story reflects the archaic logic of the sensual, while on the formal side, the logic of the technologically modern imposes itself. While the various tropes of the paradise myth play with the tone of the

mythical/utopian past, it is the documentary-like stylization of the footage shot in Tehuantepec that gives this sequence its formal characteristics, not only placing it, for the spectator, in the Mexico of the 1930s, but also employing the intertexual referent of the ethnodocumentary look, which connects it to Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* and similar projects.[4] Another striking feature of "Sandunga" is the centrality of women in it, with matriarchy as an explicit topic of the novella. Both of these features reflect the location where the episode takes place and its role both in the cultural landscape of postrevolutionary Mexico and its ideology. In this chapter I once again turn to the decade preceding Eisenstein's visit to Mexico, which is when Tehuantepec was constructed as "the birthplace of Mexican revolution," and proceed through the works of the muralists to show how these representations predate Eisenstein's novella. I then turn to the formal issue of the documentary qualities of "Sandunga," which brings up the larger issue of authenticity and its fetishization in the representation of history in Eisenstein. From a close reading of the episode, I move on to argue that the representation of femininity in "Sandunga" is related to Eisenstein's interest in Otto Rank's theories of the return to the womb, which overdetermine Eisenstein's perception of the social context of Mexico at the time of the making of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* I argue that Eisenstein's investment in Rank's theories as well as his treatment of gender in general is inseparable from his political and aesthetic program, which his own reading of the muralist paintings, to which I turn at the end of the chapter, demonstrates.

TEHUANTEPEC AS A UTOPIAN SPACE OF MEXICO

If one is to claim, as does Joanne Hershfield in her article "Paradise Regained: Sergei Eisenstein's *¡Que Viva Mexico!* as Ethnography," that the film "may be regarded as an ethnography staged as a fiction film, enacting what Shohat and Stam define as 'historiographical and anthropological role, writing the cultures of others,'"[5] it is even more important to recognize that the sources from which Eisenstein draws his anthropological study of Tehuantepec are deeply rooted in the postrevolutionary Mexican culture and mythology. The tension between the allegorical mode of representation of the muralist works by which the episode was inspired, and the historical specificity of the images and their sources was absolutely key to the muralist project, and this same tension is consistently seen in Eisenstein's film.

Perhaps the easiest way to read "Sandunga" is in direct relation to the novella that precedes it, the "Prologue." While continuing the theme of

the indigenous heritage of Mexico, "Sandunga" constitutes its opposite in most stylistic as well as thematic respects: while the "Prologue" is about death, the novella that follows it is about life.

Unlike the "Prologue," which is characterized by its static quality, at times almost resembling a photocollage, from its very first shots "Sandunga" is full of movement. Even in the shots where the camera is stationary, the profilmic space is characterized by constant movement: the people and the animals are moving, there is constant play of light and shadows, underscored by the movement of the palm trees. While the "Prologue" is set in the land of the dead and most of the objects are—or at least appear—petrified, "Sandunga" is overflowing with natural life. In contrast to the immobile stones of the previous episode, here we get constant images of living creatures—animals, birds, and people. Even the repeated shots of water (of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec) are full of motion—the wind breaking the waves and the play of light on the water. The insistence on the images of the water are not entirely arbitrary: first of all, they can be seen as referencing the first murals of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) painted by Diego Rivera—"Nacimiento del Mar" ("The Birth of the Sea") and "El Mar" ("The Sea"), which precede the murals of *Mexico Tropical—Paisaje de Tehuantepec* (*Tropical Mexico—Landscape of Tehuantepec*) and the many murals of the Tehuana women. These images of the water are intertwined with the theme of creation, prominent in the SEP murals as well as in all the other earlier works by the muralists. Thus the shots of the sea in "Sandunga" serve a dual function: they authenticate the images by being recognizable as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, while at the same time they contribute to the discourse of the creation myth of Tehuantepec as the birthplace of Mexican culture and the new Mexican state.

The setting of "Sandunga" once again positions the "primitive" indigenous culture as a point of origin, representing the indigenous culture of Tehuantepec as a kind of a utopic origin of the nation. The story of the creation of Tehuantepec as the iconic space of the nation with its indigenous roots takes us back to the early 1920s and the years of Vasconcelos's cultural policies. When Vasconcelos supposedly recalled Diego Rivera from France to participate in the project of nation building through arts and education, the first muralist project he assigned in 1922 was decorating the walls of the Bolivar Amphitheater in the National Preparatory School (*el Anfiteatro Bolivar de la Escuela Preparatoria*). After the first six months, Vasconcelos was still not happy with the results of his commission, proclaiming Rivera's style "too Europeanized." After Rivera demonstrated some interest in Best Maugard's lecture on traditional Mexican

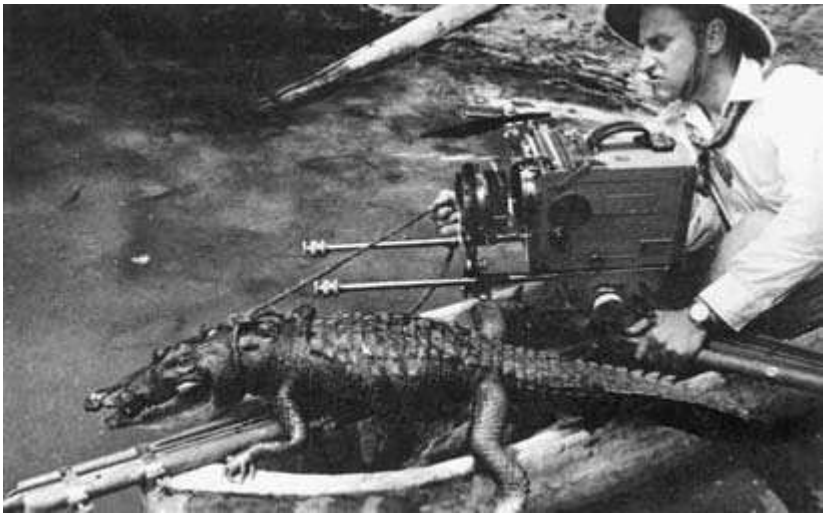

Figure 11. Alexandrov at camera, Tehuantepec, January–March 1931. Ivor Montagu Papers, The British Film Institute, London.

art, Vasconcelos, apparently upon Best Maugard's advice, financed Rivera's trip to the south of Mexico to "put him back in touch with his roots" and instill in him a sense of national pride. Thus Tehuantepec was chosen as the site of "tropical paradise" and the birth of the Mexican nation. One finds ecstatic accounts of Rivera's experiences in his memoirs, as well as in Jean Charlot's canonical text on the Mexican muralist movement.[6] Upon his return from Tehuantepec, Rivera changed his style considerably, incorporating a Rousseau-like vision of a Mexican paradise as part of the mural *Creation*.[7] But it was the depiction of the Tehuana women as part of his famous murals at the SEP in Mexico City that Mayakovsky admired during his visit to Mexico in 1925 and Eisenstein first saw—photographed by Tina Modotti and brought by Rivera on his trip to Moscow—in 1927.[8] Later that same year, Tina Modotti did a series of photographs of Tehuanas, which became famous in the U.S. The same ornate costumes and jewelry of Tehuana women that we see in those photos are even more recognizable to us now from the self-portraits and photographs of Frida Kahlo. By the early 1930s, Tehuantepec became recognizable from the murals, paintings, and photographs of the famous Mexico-based artists, and imported abroad as the vision of the authentic indigenous foundation of the country. In the cultural mythology of Mexico, actively created by Vasconcelos and Best Maugard, and later the muralists, Tehuantepec came to be the site of the mythological origins—a tropical paradise adorned with ornately decorated, powerful, indigenous women. The images of

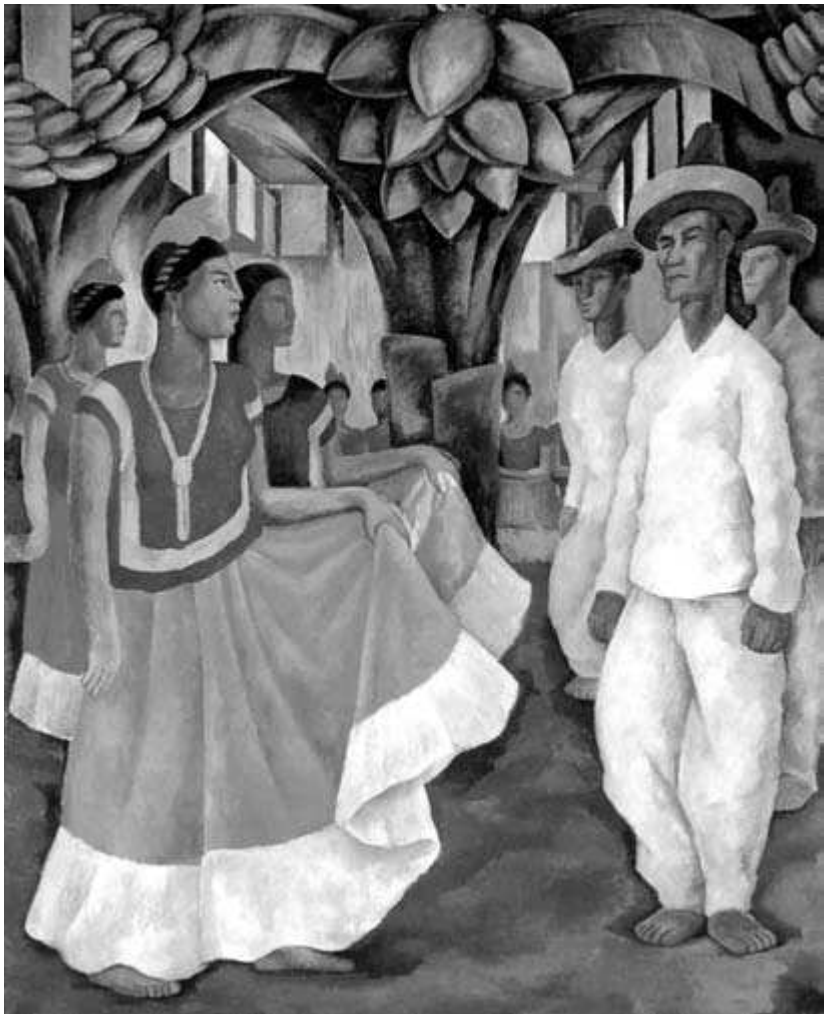

Figure 12. Diego Rivera, Fiesta Tehuana, 1928. © 2008 Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust. Av. Cinco de Mayo No. 2, Col. Centro, Del. Cuauhtémoc 06059, México, D.F.

this mythological Indian, existing as if independent from the economy and culture of contemporary Mexico, is as characteristic of—and strikingly similar to—postrevolutionary Mexico's iconography as it is of any European romantic or modernist primitivism.

If the "Prologue" is more concerned with a kind of geography and the architectonics of Yucatán, and the focus of most of its shots is the static landscape (even with an inclusion of people in the mise-en-scène), the main focus of "Sandundga" is on the moving figures. Unlike the abstract

muted background of many shots of the "Prologue" (as many of the Maya artifacts were actually shot in the Museo Nacional against a curtain or a wall), in the medium close-ups of Tehuanas, which constitute approximately one-third of the footage of "Sandunga," both the women and their background are natural. Not only are the women themselves constantly moving—changing their facial expressions, fidgeting, fixing their hair, peeling bananas—but the background is full of life and constantly changes as well. Everything is calculated to give an impression of natural life taking place before the camera. As a result, while the "Prologue" is striking by virtue of the artificiality of its setting (in spite of its intended authenticity), "Sandunga" appears to be most like the ethnodocumentary, hence seemingly less artificial. The contrast between death and life is thematically emphasized as well—while the narrative climax of the "Prologue" is a funeral procession, "Sandunga" culminates in a wedding ceremony and the birth of the son of the protagonists, further realizing the metaphor of Tehuantepec as the birthplace of Mexican civilization.

AUTHENTIC PAST AND THE ORGANIC CONTINUITY OF HISTORY

The universalism of the primitive structures is another way of stating its continuity with the present and the lack of change. For both Eisenstein and the Mexican intellectuals involved in the project of bringing the country's precolonial past to life and affirming its presence (and, hence, in positing it as the most important part of national identity), at stake was a reconstruction of some kind of organic continuity of history, deliberately overlooking the gap of time that had passed and any change it had caused, thus trying to nullify change itself. At the same time, and not unrelated, this was an attempt to bring into light a vision of the past necessarily transferable to the present, as a site of social harmony free of socioeconomic discontent and conflict. Scholars have conventionally associated these kinds of ideas with right-wing nationalists. For example, in his discussion of the nineteenth century's emphasis on the search for historical authenticity in Europe, George Mosse links this ideal with reactionary romanticism and the creation of a *Volks* nation.[9] But, as Philip Rosen asserts in his book *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory*, "The pursuit of authentic pastness may instead include elements of a more dynamic consciousness of temporality and a different kind of politics. Even in the exemplary preservationist figure of William Morris, one can find a more complicated reaction to industrial capitalism, which included an attraction to socialism."[10]

This process "where contestations and struggles over modes and uses of authentication and the authority of pastness can occur"[11] can be a very complex one, and should not automatically be identified simply with mythologizing the past and its insertion into the political ideology of the present. In the case of Eisenstein, his vision of the past was infected by ideological discourse found in anthropological studies of the turn of century in Mexico. What is also important is the fetishistic structure that dominates the film and the way in which it is related to the construction of an authentic past. His attempt at reconstructing the historical past in the film, as well as in his writing, however, should not be reduced to mere mythologizing of the past, the erasure of historical actuality and obliteration of history as such. What he attempts, and arguably fails at, is a radically new construction of historicity of which the vision of a premodern utopia is a part.

In fact, both the artists on the political left (the muralists, Frida Kahlo, and Tina Modotti) and the ones on the right were involved in a similar search for national origins and a reconstruction of an authentic Mexican past, through both the representation of history—national, world, and personal—and the representation of contemporary Mexico.

THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY

Paradoxically enough, this search for the universal, which is characteristic of both Best Maugard's and Eisenstein's theories, coincides with a search for an authentic past upon which to build the present. Eisenstein was impressed by the existence of the unchanged and untouched authentic past within the present in Mexico: "About Mexico I must say that it is even more extraordinary and marvelous than I supposed . . . the absolute virginity and authenticity charms—especially after the boredom and artificiality of dear old Hollywood."[12] This is just one of the many examples where Eisenstein emphasizes the authenticity—not necessarily of his film, but of the actual reality he is filming, of what he perceives to be living history. The reception of the film, even while it is in the making, is focused on *its* authenticity in being linked to the national artistic tradition. In an article written by Eisenstein's legal representative in Mexico, Fernández Bustamante, he asserts the authenticity of the film, identifying it as "our Mexican authentic drama": "Everything is absolutely Mexican, everything has a character and psychology which is ours, there is not a single image which could be seen as harmful to our nationality . . . this art which is ours aspires to create a national cinematography, one must study the technique of the Russian director because it can be used as a guideline

for future Mexican productions."[13] In an ironic twist, Eisenstein's film is seen here as "more Mexican" than any film a Mexican artist could aspire to make as a defensive gesture against the accusations that foreigners degrade Mexico in their work. In actuality, this "authenticity" of Eisenstein's film is largely due to the recognizability of the images in the film—especially in "Sandunga"—as based on the already established system of representation created after the Mexican revolution.

Eisenstein, on the other hand, was concerned both with the authenticity of the Mexican film (hence all the assurances from the censors that what was represented was historically accurate) and with its novelty, as was constantly emphasized by all members of the crew:

> In Tehuantepec we shot exclusively new material, such material has not been seen on the screen before. In general, no one had filmed in Tehuantepec before, so this is completely new material for the screen. We have enough filmed material for half of one part, so we still have three and a half parts left to shoot. Mexico as such had never been filmed before, so it's our fortune to be the first to film the real Mexico, and this country is terrific in the sense, in the sense of the cinematographic material; it's too bad we cannot use color film, that would have been a hundred percent more successful.[14]

While this preoccupation links this film to the overall trend in the early cinema for representing the "as yet unseen," it also puts *¡Que Viva Mexico!* in the context of films that function as visual documents in the construction of history: it is intended to be a proof, as it were, that Eisenstein's theories and his versions of history are correct. So while in the "Prologue" the juxtaposition of the faces of Indians with the stone gods prove the continuity of indigenous life in Mexico, in "Sandunga" the ethnographic material shot by the crew is intended to demonstrate the co-presence of different epochs within Mexico (an uneven development, not unlike what we see in Russia during that period).

Once again, a reading of the filmic structure of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* (and of "Sandunga" specifically) is contingent on constant tensions between the abstract (and mythological) and the historic, as indexically specific, exemplified by the documentary quality of the footage, implying a dialectical relationship between them. We will address this tension later in the chapter, but first it is necessary to return to the figure of the indigenous in "Sandunga" as not only the embodiment of the authentic past in the sense of the precolonial cultural origin for the foundation of the postrevolutionary Mexican nation, but also as the embodiment of the revolutionary present, and of the utopian future.

"SANDUNGA": DOCUMENTARY QUALITIES

In contrast to all the mythological and artistic allusions and a purely symbolic status of the images, due to the actual documentary quality of the footage, "Sandunga" provides us with more information and a more accurate historical reading of the women who were filmed for that novella as opposed to the representation of the abstract mythological Tehuanas. The presence of the nonindigenous (Christian and colonial) culture as the filter for representation of the supposedly authentically premodern society points to a conception of historicity quite opposite to the one hailed by the Mexican Revolution and to what is usually emphasized by the various voiceovers of the different versions of the film: Tehuantepec as an authentic premodern society untouched by colonial culture, the "pure" source for the newly formed postrevolutionary national identity; an image of an absolute authentic past. The images themselves provide a counterpoint to the mythic construction of the indigenous, contradicting the claim that life has not changed: in fact, what we see is an unavoidable synthesis of modernity and tradition, of indigenous civilization and its later historical permutation.

The dance and song "Sandunga," which provides the title of this novella, is clearly shaped by later colonial culture. This is evident from the European way of dancing (a couple, with the man leading the woman) and the instruments used (a European-style band). Even the traditional Tehuana dresses, which came to represent the authentic and untouched indigenous culture, as in Frida Kahlo's self-portrait as a Tehuana, according to a popular legend originated from a Spanish ship that sank off the coast of Oaxaca and washed exquisite lace and cotton ashore.[15] Thus even the part of the film that in some sense stands for a premodern element, which is then dialectically synthesized into modernity, bears in the actuality of its material the evidence of its modernity. This is possible because of the authenticity (i.e., documentary nature) of the footage itself, as it always contains indexical traces of the exact moment with its historical specificity; it is both the past that Eisenstein tries to reconstruct, and his contemporary present of the moment of the filming.

The muralists themselves had to negotiate between the well-researched indexality of their images as referring to specific and recognizable geohistorical objects, such as Tehuantepec, where they had to go to "study" the object of their paintings, in order to make them part of an allegorical representation. Likewise, in order to produce an abstract—and, arguably, an allegorical—construction of history, Eisenstein depends on the historically specific visual material taken through documentary-like footage in Tehuantepec.

However, this visual specificity, instead of adding to the effect of realism and authenticity, becomes overwhelming and visual details take over the narrative. Although this fact is not fully established, there are sources that suggest that some of the characters filmed in this episode were actually cabaret actors and actresses brought by Eisenstein from Mexico City, where he was a regular at night clubs and burlesque shows. We shall return to Eisenstein's fascinations with the burlesque theater later. A further complication challenging the realism and authenticity of Eisenstein's footage arises even on the level of the narrative when we consider the fact that, unlike the traditional discourse where women act as the object of men's social exchange, "Sandunga" presents the exact opposite. In addition, by referring to the premodern economic barter relations, "Sandunga" depicts a society before the commodity fetishism of capitalism. Instead, this fetishism—commodity and sexual alike—is displaced on the images of men and onto the costumes and sets, with their elaborate and ornate decor.

CLOSE READING

All the footage for "Sandunga" can be loosely divided into four parts: the scenic shots of Tehuantepec and its inhabitants (animals and people); the shots that establish the theme of the acquisition of a husband by means of completing a dowry in the form of a gold necklace (explaining the system of economic exchange); sequences that depict women working for the dowry or in preparation for a wedding (production); and, finally, the wedding celebration of Concepción and Abundio.

The first group of images depicting life in Tehuantepec in effect constructs a representation of paradise. This is done by using a standard Christian trope: the peaceful coexistence of various animals and humans (including crocodiles, panthers, and iguanas, as well as monkeys and exotic birds). The name of the main protagonist—Concepción—betrays, or perhaps intentionally emphasizes, the fact that the scenes of primitive (and hence pagan) life are constructed through an overtly Christian framework, making a smooth transition to the following episode, "La Fiesta," which is centered on Spanish religious and cultural practices. Then follows the representation of "the primitive" as sensuous and yet innocent, the nudity of the body proving, upon analysis, to be a projection or an illustration of Christian mythology and its suppressed dream vision of the body. In this first cluster of shots we see sequences with bare-breasted women with flowers in their hair, very reminiscent of Gaugin's Tahitian women and Flaherty's Moana, and it is quite

Figure 13. Image from "Sandunga." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

possible that both served as direct inspiration for them. These images seem to be only loosely connected narratively to the story of Concepción, and they serve as a kind of establishing sequence, establishing the setting of Tehuantepec as a complete Edenic space. Moreover, this section of the footage was actually shot in Colima, quite far from Tehuantepec, but such flower arrangements were never seen in either area. The unusually long (for Eisenstein) takes, such as those of the woman in the boat, linger on the woman's body and the exotic scenery. The splendor of the naked women's bodies in the rest of the novella is replaced by the excessive decor of their dress. The focal point of the shots shifts from women's breasts to their ornate skirts and headpieces. Both the naked body and the feminine decorations traditionally serve as the center of the spectacle, especially in an exotic setting, where they act as the very marker of an exotic otherness. And yet both the naked body and the excessive detail of the decorations are linked in their opposition to the predominant artistic and ideological "official" classical aesthetics in Mexico. Thus the body itself is a locus of utopia, a figure of resistance to the Catholic, and especially Jesuit, suppression of the corporeal, which historically (particularly in Mexico) takes the form of ornate decoration and the excess of the baroque.

The ornate dresses and decorations, aside from their function as a focal center of the spectacle, act as a narrative force in "Sandunga," where the plot is centered on the acquisition of a necklace, underlining the symbolic and social function of the dowry in the matriarchal society. While the first group of images in "Sandunga" sets up Tehuantepec as Eden, the second cluster of shots establishes this theme of economic exchange and assigning value to objects. Most remarkable in this respect are match-cuts and dissolves between the close-up of a necklace made of flowers, then the gold necklace (the dowry that Concepción has to collect), and the future groom in his hammock. All three are objects of exchange invested with libidinal as well as economic powers.

The last group of images in "Sandunga" is centered around the wedding celebration. The wedding and the preparations occupy such an important part of this episode and take up a significant part of the footage. They act as a kind of a counternarrative, much in the same way that song-and-dance numbers do in a Hollywood musical, allowing for a pure spectacle in the center of which are, of course, women. Here, however, I would argue that the dresses and the decorations themselves are the center of the spectacle, more than the female bodies, and that they thematically form part of the narrative itself. What is most memorable about these sequences is precisely their excess, the textures and the shapes of the dresses and decorations. Thus they produce a kind of fetishistic spectacle, obscuring (yet paradoxically revealing, by drawing attention to the objects themselves) the process of signification. These abstract shapes, however, resonate with the geometrical shapes of the pyramids and ruins of the "Prologue," and in particular graphically emphasize the figure of a circle.

FETISHIZATION OF HISTORY

In another paradoxical reversal, "natural" life in Tehuantepec in "Sandunga" is represented as highly artificial and marked by the overabundance of visual decoration, as best exemplified in the wedding sequence with the ornateness of Tehuana costumes. While the "Prologue" with its abundance of monumental structures and statues can rightly be compared to *October*, especially in its insistence on the metaphor of petrification, in "Sandunga" stones and statues are replaced by the abundance of nature (animals and exotic plants) on the one hand, and by the ornate costumes of the women on the other.

As a result, in spite of its repeated emphasis on historical and ethnographic authenticity, the footage of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* is extremely staged

Figure 14. Sergei M. Eisenstein and Eduard Tisse shooting "Sandunga," Tehuantepec, January–March 1931. Olivier Debroise collection, Mexico City.

and ornate. By bringing the aesthetic artificiality—pure form—to the fore, which works counter to the claims of historical authenticity of the image, this baroque overabundance of detail transforms *¡Que Viva Mexico!* from a near-documentary or a fiction film into a historical spectacle, as discussed by Philip Rosen, in which the decorative historical detail overwhelms and counterbalances the narrative itself. "In historical spectacle, a proliferation of detail seems to exceed the reality-effect, and in so doing becomes something like a virtuoso performance of the profilmic. From the perspective of the 'serious' historical film, historical spectacle unbalances the interplay between a 'true story' and a recognizably 'historical' mise-en-scène by emphasizing the underlying ambivalences of the latter in respect to referenciality."[16] The same visual details that are normally added to function as construction of verisimilitude in their overabundance achieve the opposite effect, underlining the theatricality and artificiality of the image, far exceeding the narrative necessity. While this tension between the plot (the structure) of the film and its "proof" of verisimilitude is crucial to the dual nature of the spectatorial investment in the cinematic process, the overabundance of tokens of historical authenticity results in a different kind of filmmaking: film as pure spectacle. Since the late 1960s film as spectacle has traditionally been associated in film theory with the fetishistic nature of mainstream

cinema, in which spectacle is usually that of the female body. In a historical spectacle, as discussed by Rosen, the object of the spectacle is often history itself, and the objects invested with historical authenticity are on display. Very often, however, the spectacle centers on women and on objects. One may argue that the historical spectacle and the fetishizing of the historical detail (which plays the same function) is a mode of displacement of the libidinal energies and is thus a mere displacement of the classical Freudian fetishism, equally applicable to women-as-spectacle and to historical-detail-as-spectacle. Rosen theorizes on this point, and it is worth quoting here in full because it provides a theoretical model that can help explain the necessary gendering of history, and the fusion of the emphasis on historical authenticity with sexuality. In "Sandunga" we see this investment of libidinal energy in both the actual subjects (Tehuana women) and the objects (necklace, ornate decorations) associated with the emphasis on historical and actual authenticity of this episode. Rosen provides a framework for looking at the historicity of the footage itself as a fetish:

> Suppose we consider the authentic, preserved historical object in analogy with a fetish object. There are at least two points about this scenario which resonate with our account. . . . First, the fetish object as a "part" of the woman's body that, in the fantastic logic of the symptom, restores it as a "whole" body (one not subject to castration). . . . Similarly, if one fixates on an authenticated, pres-erved object as a trace of a vanished past that brings one into contact with it, that object is just one fragment or part of a postulated total past . . . as the royal road by which a subject may imagine a reconstituted past. . . .
>
> Second, the fetishistic overvaluation of a "part" in Freud's scenario is a process of disavowal. . . . Subsequent and repetitive fixations on the fetish object would not be necessary if the threatening knowledge had been obliterated. Fetishism therefore assumes a constant underlying awareness of the threat that must be constantly warded off. This suggests that the fetishist retains some awareness of the impossibility, and hence the artificiality, of the solution.[17]

We return here to the question of the excess in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* as evidence of an underlying anxiety, suggested in the first chapter. Although intended as a way to fully reconstruct the whole and erase the inevitable passing of time, and thus history itself, as the emphasis on the untouched quality of life in Tehuantepec would suggest, fetishistic excess achieves a rupture of this utopian unity: a constant reminder of the artificiality of the image.

At the same time, according to this psychoanalytical model the fetishization of history is a sign of anxiety. This anxiety governing the operation of the fetishistic excess is usually associated with the fear of castration. If the fetish, according to Rosen's model, is the objectification of history, the castration anxiety can also be placed in a historical context. As I suggested earlier in the context of pure allegorization of women and the absence of any historical female characters in the film, the repressed anxiety of which Rosen speaks can be historicized as the fear of female subjectivity provoked by the women's movement. While fetishism is, indeed, an important category in the psychoanalytical discourse, it also plays a crucial role in the Marxist analysis of commodity culture, and as such is obviously relevant to "Sandunga," with its emphasis on exchange.[18]

This importance and value of objects and their functioning may be a reflection of Eisenstein's interest in another aspect of sensuous thinking—assigning magical qualities to objects, of objects acquiring a special value. At the same time, the narrative of "Sandunga" is also about an acquisition of value: a barter exchange. Just as the "Prologue" is, in a way, a story of stones and ruins and their relationship to society and the people of Eisenstein's contemporary Mexico, this first novella is also a story of an object and its symbolic and economic significance. At the historical stage depicted in "Sandunga," the object of exchange (a coin necklace) both bears the trace of the labor it took to produce it, and is not by itself invested with desirability—even money itself has no symbolic power at this stage, but rather literally forms part of the object exchange. The value of labor here is directly mirrored by the value of marriage, and even more specifically by another kind of production: that of childbearing (yet another significance of the name Concepción, and the emphasis on the child in the last part of the novella, which seems temporally unmotivated). While the story is about objects, even the objects in "Sandunga" are endowed with life, as underlined by the match-cut between flowers, linking the story to nature, the gold necklace as the object of exchange, and the man as the object of libidinal desire. Once again, inanimate objects are linked with people, which is consistent with the emphasis on organic life in this episode, and men appear—contrary to the traditional modes of gender representation—as an object of exchange, fetishized and erotically objectified.

"SANDUNGA" AND THE RETURN TO THE MOTHER'S WOMB

If the social organization of Tehuantepec is presented as organic and natural, so much the more striking is the fact of the matriarchy, reversing

the patriarchal social norms and the "natural" position of women within them. This seems to also reverse the system of representation in which woman is a passive object to be looked at. In the novella, women get to choose their partners, and not the other way around. In a characteristic reversal, what seems like the most conservative essentialist position in the reconstruction of the premodern as the natural leads to the unexpected conclusion that that which is natural is, in fact, not patriarchy but matriarchy, and a complete reversal of all the gender roles and norms of representation. There is, however, another reason why it is especially significant for Eisenstein that the birthplace of the Mexican revolution and the image of the Edenic paradise—Tehuantepec—is ruled by women. In Eisenstein's writings, paradise repeatedly coincides with a concept that gradually becomes more and more important—that of the return to the mother's womb, a concept that he took mainly from Rank's writings on birth trauma. These persistent metaphors of birth and womb in relation to both artistic and social development are not merely metaphors for Eisenstein—rather, they are metaphors understood as linguistic atavisms that point to the direction of the coincidence of these phenomena. As understood by Eisenstein, history is always biological, social, and personal at the same time. The dark and moist tropical area of Tehuantepec is not only a stand-in for the womb (of the civilization, of the revolution, and so on), but actually coincides with it and is analogous to the real womb of a woman. Eisenstein's further development of these ideas found its most explicit manifestation in the notes from the last two years of his life (1947–48), grouped under the title "Mlb"—the image of mother's womb, "obraza materinskogo lona." In these notes he explores the image of the return to the womb as the prototype of all artistic creation, where the form of a circle or a sphere always designates this evolutionary regression to the originary undifferentiated state prior to birth. Although his interest in the evolutionary development of life forms, both individual and collective, started much earlier,[19] Eisenstein claims that the explicit link between primitive art and the theme of the return to the womb came from a book that he "stole" from Robert Flaherty in Hollywood[20]—Miguel Covarrubias's *Island of Bali*. While this is historically inaccurate, since *Island of Bali* was only published in 1937 (the book Eisenstein found was probably Covarrubias's *Negro Drawings*), in much of his later writing on "Mlb" Eisenstein uses examples from this book, as well as Covarrubias's own drawings and caricatures, leading him to the conclusion that "Mlb. [is] *everywhere* in art!"[21] The role that Covarrubias's book plays in Eisenstein's notes allows for the claim that the development of his ideas of the return to the womb also leads back to Eisenstein's Mexican period and is certainly linked to it

in his own recollections. We can then analyze the imagery of "Sandunga" retrospectively through Eisenstein's writing from the 1940s.

In the notes from October 16, 1948, on Engels's writings on the family ("*k Engelsu o semje*"), Eisenstein constructs a system of analogies linking matriarchy to the return to the womb, to the sea/ocean, to the image of paradise, to the "early undiffereciated consciousness," to the unconscious, and to preclass society. He starts with the idea that sublimation finds its manifestation in the modes of production. Following Engels, the first and the most primitive mode of production he designates as reproduction, making the woman the original mode of production: "The process of sublimation—as ontogenesis—is phylogenies—in each individual case: the evolutionary ladder and its repetition in the embryo—replicates this process in the history of socially conscious human being, which takes the place of the previous one at a certain stage of development. This is very important!!!"[22]

After his analysis of the womb imagery in the Bible and the Greek myths, he then returns to Engels and the associations of the artistic forms that are closer to the womb (i.e., the originary undifferentiated state of being), with the matriarchy as the earliest stage of the development of the society: "The polarity of the two types of culture within the prehistoric era of 'maternal law' and 'paternal law' is reflected in art just as the figurative plastic art prevails in the cultures of 'maternal law.'"[23] Eisenstein then associates patriarchy with the emergence of a class system, which leads him to equate matriarchy and preclass society, which he then links to the unconscious: "very important: the subconscious, the unconscious—a copy of preclass, the rule of matriarchy."[24] A little further down, he continues: "so the sensuous-complex prelogical consciousness, the production of vessels—are attributes of the matriarchy."[25] So, finally, here we have a fusion of all the separate elements—thematic as well as stylistic, explicit as well as implied—of "Sandunga": the matriarchy as the natural state, the image of paradise, the preclass society with childbirth as the predominant mode of production, associated with the sensuous and the primitive, and necessary to incorporate into a total synthesis that can allow for a definitive shift from the preclass to the postclass society. Returning to the imagery of the womb, which Eisenstein uses to describe Diego Rivera's art (and his persona!), given that much of the imagery of "Sandunga" was directly influenced by Rivera's murals this association becomes more explicit. However, as we remember, Eisenstein insists on this being merely one pole, only one element of the future synthesis of his own art, the other being the more "phallic," "masculine" art of Orozco. This is the dialectical model informing Eisenstein's theory: the synthesis

of Rivera embodying the Tehuanas and the matriarchy, and Orozco embodying the phallus and the patriarchy. It is hard to resist commenting on the use of the two men as embodying the opposite qualities, the yin and the yang, the feminine and the masculine. Once again, there are no actual women here, only woman as a symbol and an abstraction, and in fact embodied by a man.[26] Moreover, woman in this scenario is equated with the womb, and, ultimately, with the tomb underlying the circularity of life and death in the primitive cultures.[27] This motif appears in the same notes in relation to the matriarchy as: "(religion in it is above all—cult of the dead) NB: Womb-returning."[28]

THE PRIMITIVE AS UTOPIAN

Historically, in 1920s and 1930s Mexico, an indigenous figure was a twofold image: of revolution and resistance, as well as of the state's inability to deal with the historical and economic situation of inequality. For the muralists the image of an Indian was an embodiment of revolutionary rupture, as associated with Emiliano Zapata and the popular roots of the Mexican Revolution, and more specifically the agrarian reforms associated with it, combining Socialist origins with the more traditional premodern forms of land organization.[29] At the same time, the creation of the myth of historical continuity with the pre-Columbian past in Mexico served as a way to erase the historical memory of another rupture—the conquest—by replacing it with the image of the organic past that the Aztec and Maya civilizations represent. Logically, then, the protagonist of the episode is a woman, Concepción: she is the source of Mexican civilization, the foundation of Mexican culture. The figure of Concepción is the first of a series of competing images of "mothers of the Mexican state," corresponding to the specific Mexican national myths of the foundation of the Mexican state. In "Sandunga," then, she is a free, pure, and innocent Indian, untouched by Spanish colonialism or American capitalism, or even by patriarchy. The idea of the simultaneous presence of the different historical formations in Mexico unexpectedly turns out to be intertwined with the representation of women, and indirectly points to the question of why matriarchy is so central to "Sandunga."

For Eisenstein the identification of woman with nature—a typical historical trope in the arts—and hence with the premodern as the "state of nature" also meant linking women directly with primitive (prelogical) forms of thought, the subject in which he was particularly interested. One of the earliest clear expressions of his ideas on the sensuous thinking

and its function in Soviet art, and specifically in cinema, can be found in Eisenstein's speech at the All-Union Creative Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinematography in January 1935 (the English text of this speech is translated in *Film Form* as "New Problems"). In it Eisenstein distinguishes the "earlier," "primitive," or "sensuous" form of thinking from the "logical" and "analytical" form. But once again, quoting Engels, he insists not on a "return to the primitive" but rather on a dialectical pattern involving a synthesis of all present stages of development:

> One way or another, the study of this or that thinking construction locked within itself is profoundly incorrect. The study of sliding from one type of thinking to another, from category to category, and more—the simultaneous co-presence in varying proportions of the different types and stages and the taking into account of this circumstance, are equally as important, explanatory and revealing in this as in any other sphere: An exact representation of the universe, of its evolution, of the development of mankind, and of the reflection of this evolution in the minds of men, can therefore only be obtained by the method of dialectics, with its constant regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive or retrogressive changes.[30]

Unlike many of his contemporaries and the thinkers who influenced him, including Levy-Bruhl and Frazer, who were some of his main sources of information on anthropology, Eisenstein did not accept the idea of a linear evolutionary development. Instead he insisted that:

> not only does the process of development itself not proceed in a straight line (just like any other development process), but that it marches by continuing shifts backward and forward, independently of whether it be progressively (the movement of backward peoples toward the higher achievements of culture under a socialist regime), or retrogressively (the regress of spiritual superstructures under the heels of national-socialism). The continual sliding from level to level, forward and backward, now to higher forms of an intellectual order, now to the earlier forms of sensual thinking, occurs also at each point once reached and temporarily stable as a phase in development.[31]

This position directly echoes Lenin's postulates on the "underdeveloped" or "backward" peoples as being capable of a leap into Socialism, developed in his work on imperialism. Thus in Eisenstein the premodern—or sensuous—was not seen as either an outdated and outmoded form of existence threatening progress, or as a desirable

alternative to the horrors and decadence of the modern age. Rather, it was the precondition of revolution itself.

UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA AND MEXICO

This same model of the synthesis of the premodern and the ultramodern as giving birth to truly revolutionary art is refigured in relation to women artists in Mexico in the essay "Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti," written by Laura Mulvey in cooperation with Peter Wollen and included in the collection *Visual and Other Pleasures*. The essay was originally published in 1983 as the text for a catalogue for the exhibition of the two artists at Whitechapel. This exhibition brought the works of the two now widely celebrated female artists out of obscurity, and effectively started the cult of Frida Kahlo worldwide. What makes this essay especially important for this study is both the theoretical model that the authors use, and the fact that both Frida Kahlo's and Tina Modotti's visual works representing women (indigenous Tehuana women) served as an intertext to "Sandunga." Also significant is the role that these two female artists played in the Communist Party of Mexico (PCM) and in the art scene.

Mulvey and Wollen were well aware of these historical facts when they wrote their essay, and it is not surprising, then, that on its very first page the art of the Mexican Renaissance, to which Tina Modotti and Frida Kahlo might be said to belong, is linked to the Soviet postrevolutionary period: "The dialectical unity of art and revolution (Breton's hope), is one that has haunted the modern period. The fact that it is still no more than a hope for us today demonstrates that none of its solutions sought . . . succeeded with any degree of permanence. . . . We are left with a series of talismans, clustered most often at certain places and certain periods—Soviet art of the immediate post-revolutionary years, Berlin Dadaism, French surrealism, the Mexico renaissance—to which we may turn back for encouragement and understanding."[32]

In this article we see that the two "talismans" for Mulvey, Wollen, and their fellow travelers are linked: "It is worth comparing the art-historical fate of the Mexican renaissance with that of Russian art of the 1920s. There are similarities between the two experiences. In both countries the example of cubism enabled artists independently to develop a specific culture of modern art. In both countries the overthrow of ancient regime and the recasting of the society after political revolution and civil war gave the avant-garde a particular vision of its role, to produce the new art for the new society."[33] In the same article, Mulvey and Wollen even provide a historical reason, much along the lines of Perry

Anderson's take on modernism,[34] for this "co-incidence of fates." When talking about the historical conditions for the possibility of the overlap of the political and artistic avant-gardes in Mexico, the reason that they isolate as key is that of "uneven development," a reason that rings equally true for Russia:

> In the first place, "ancient" history was chronologically much closer and in many ways culturally closer. The archaism of the Paris avant-garde took painters either back before antiquity . . . or else into the colonies, to forms of art which were brought back to metropolis as the cultural plunder of imperialism. In Mexico the situation was very different . . . the Aztec era was simultaneous with the Italian renaissance . . . moreover, the actual language of the Aztecs (Nahuatl) was still being spoken and the Indian substructures of Mexican culture was still clearly visible. . . . Zapata's demands for land reform were posed and understood as demands for a return to pre-Conquest forms of village organization. A political history was being discovered and revived as well as an artistic one. . . . It is for this reason, among others, that it was possible for political and artistic avant-gardes to overlap in Mexico in a way that they never could in Europe.[35]

All of this can be seen as somewhat analogous to the cultural situation in Russia, although similarities are not to be overemphasized as, of course, there existed many very significant differences. By the 1920s, only half a century had passed since serfdom had been abolished, and the traditional premodern culture was still in existence; moreover, it was a vibrant one, and often the only form of culture in many of the more remote, and even not so remote, areas of the country. The Tatar invasion, which allowed for the unique fusion of the Russian with the Orient, resulting in the foundations for the modern national identity, also occurred relatively late in comparison to the history of Europe, much like the cosmic race described by Vasconcelos that resulted from the Spanish conquest of America.

These similarities in the historical situations in terms of uneven development in Russia and Mexico at the time and their consequences for the emerging new cultures allow for a more complex analysis of the history of the avant-garde in the two countries. Parallels between the situations in postrevolutionary Mexico and the Soviet Union were crucial for Eisenstein. He saw Mexico as a complex society, as a place in which primitive and modern societies coexist: "The history of the change of cultures presented not vertically (in years and centuries) but horizontally (as the geographical coexistence of the most diverse stage of culture), for which Mexico is so amazing in that it has a province (Tehuantepec) that

has a matriarchal society next to the provinces that almost achieved communism in the revolution in the first decades of this century (Yucatan, Zapata's program)."[36]

The connection between this and the situation in Russia is made explicit by Eisenstein's comments in regard to his film *Old and New* (*General'naia liniia*, 1929), which were recorded by Joseph Freeman in 1928 in Moscow, shortly before Eisenstein and the crew embarked on the trip that would eventually lead him to Mexico. "My new film involves an analysis of all 'five phases' of Lenin—I'll show five phases of economic development which coexist in the Soviet Russia today: patriarchic economy, domestic economy, private capitalism together with socialism and state capitalism. The stone age coincides with the latest advances of science and social organization, and, most notably, all five at the same time."[37]

THE FEMININE AS PRIMITIVE

In spite of these significant differences in the attitudes toward the primitive among Eisenstein and many of his fellow avant-garde artists and thinkers, one thing they all shared was the constant alignment of these sensuous or primitive qualities along gender lines. As Laura Podalsky notes in her essay, in the same speech in 1935 quoted above, Eisenstein proceeded to give examples of "sensuous thinking": a young girl who rips up a picture of her unfaithful lover, Catherine de Medici sticking pins into effigies of her enemies, and rural Mexicans' rituals during the drought using Catholic images because they coincided with ancient rain deities. "Without saying so explicitly, these examples suggest that adolescence, females, and Mexicans have more than their fair share of early thought processes and that they tend to slip away from later, more scientific ones with greater ease."[38] This association of women with the primitive, and at the same time—paradoxically—with the revolution is what marks all of *¡Que Viva Mexico!*, and "Sandunga" in particular.

I would argue that the emphasis on both acts as a fetishistic structure is a means of dealing with the anxiety of history: of modernization on the one hand, and of the emergence and the importance of women's movements on the other. While the coinciding of the different eras allows for a certain erasure of the passing of time and an illusion of the presentness of the past (hence, a disavowal of the actual historical changes and the loss brought about by them), the allegorical use of the figure of the woman allows for a disavowal of the presence and the role of real women. But at the same time that these strategies seem to be obscuring these historical traumas, they paradoxically bring them to the fore.

This attention to women and their central position in the narrative is something that Eisenstein identified as specifically Mexican.

> As his work progressed his story developed and he made the discovery that served as a thread upon which he has hung his episodes. This discovery, namely, Eisenstein's recognition of the importance of woman's position in that country as in no other in the world, converted his film from a dimensionalized fresco to the representation of a sociological problem as old as Mexico itself and as important as its breath of life. . . . Her influence is as subtle as the Indian overconquest and swallowing-up of his Spanish conqueror. The peon is ruled by his wife, the solider goes to war but refuses to fight unless his wife is with him. There particularly is woman important, for sometimes she is the advance guard, going somewhere to prepare a town for the force's comfort, bringing up the rear with consolation and ministering presence.[39]

The original article (written in 1931 immediately after Helprin's return from his trip to Mexico) was read by Eisenstein, and as reported by Aragón Leiva in his letter to Seymour Stern, the editor of the film journal *Experimental Cinema* and an ardent supporter of Eisenstein in Los Angeles, Eisenstein had read a draft of the article and approved of it, saying that it was correct. Moreover, as Helprin claims in his October 1931 letter to Stern, Eisenstein explained this particular conception of the film to Helprin in great detail. According to this version, the goal of the film was not merely to deal with the Mexican revolution but "going broader to include civilization and the mark of the female in it." In spite of this emphasis on the universal qualities of the female, the complete omission of any mention of the actual women in Mexico who played an important role in both the art and political scene of Mexico during that period makes it necessary to situate this interest historically.

The actual historical situation in the 1920s, both in the Soviet Union and Mexico, facilitated—if for a very short time—the women's movements in both countries. In spite of the prevalence and dominance of men in the muralist movement in Mexico, today the Mexican Renaissance is known worldwide to a large degree because of two women: Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti, who were "canonized" by the feminists in the U.S. and Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to these two major figures, Mexican cultural history of the 1920s and 1930s in its more recent revisions shows a significant presence of women who to a large extent shaped that history.[40]

At the same time, neither the Soviet Union nor Mexico in that period could possibly be seen as a "paradise" for women. "Revolutionary culture," both in the arts and in politics, was in some ways even more masculine and male dominated, and the "revolutionary spirit" was constantly associated with male virility and aggressive masculinity. As a result, any alternative constructions of gender were under attack.[41] In spite of their growing number, female artists in 1920s and 1930s Mexico had a hard time being recognized by their male fellow artists—the most famous case being that of Maria Izquierdo in Mexico. Izquierdo wanted to paint murals but was consistently excluded from the union, which led to her artistic isolation and her inability to enter the public arena. Similarly, Frida Kahlo had a great interest in painting murals, but instead, especially after her debilitating accident, turned to the much more private genre of self-portraits full of pain and loneliness.

TINA MODOTTI

In contrast to Kahlo's paintings, Tina Modotti's photography remained very public. Although she started off in a characteristically female position as a model and a mistress of Edward Weston, a famous American photographer who came to Mexico in the 1920s, as well a model for some of Diego Rivera's murals, Modotti soon learned photography herself. Unlike Weston, whose work remained very abstract, she became extremely politically engaged and joined the newly formed Communist Party of Mexico (PCM). Modotti not only took photographs of the murals, which made Diego Rivera famous around the world, but also took a series of photographs used by Anita Brenner as illustrations to her book *Idols Behind Altars*. Modotti was never formally credited for these photographs, nor was Weston, whose photographs were also included in the book. But being the more famous photographer of the two, he is typically credited, to the exclusion of Modotti, for all of the illustrations. It was not until the 1980s, after the Whitechapel exhibition for which Mulvey and Wollen's article was written, that Tina Modotti's work became celebrated worldwide, and an impressive number of scholarly and popular studies were written about her art and her life.

Despite the fact that most of Eisenstein's visual exposure to Mexico before his arrival was through Modotti's photographs (in Moscow, he saw the photographs of Rivera's murals and he also saw the illustrations to *Idols Behind Altars*), Eisenstein never mentions Tina Modotti's name. Modotti's more political photographs of the 1920s, depicting the harsh realities of life in Mexico, were not published there except in *El Machete*,

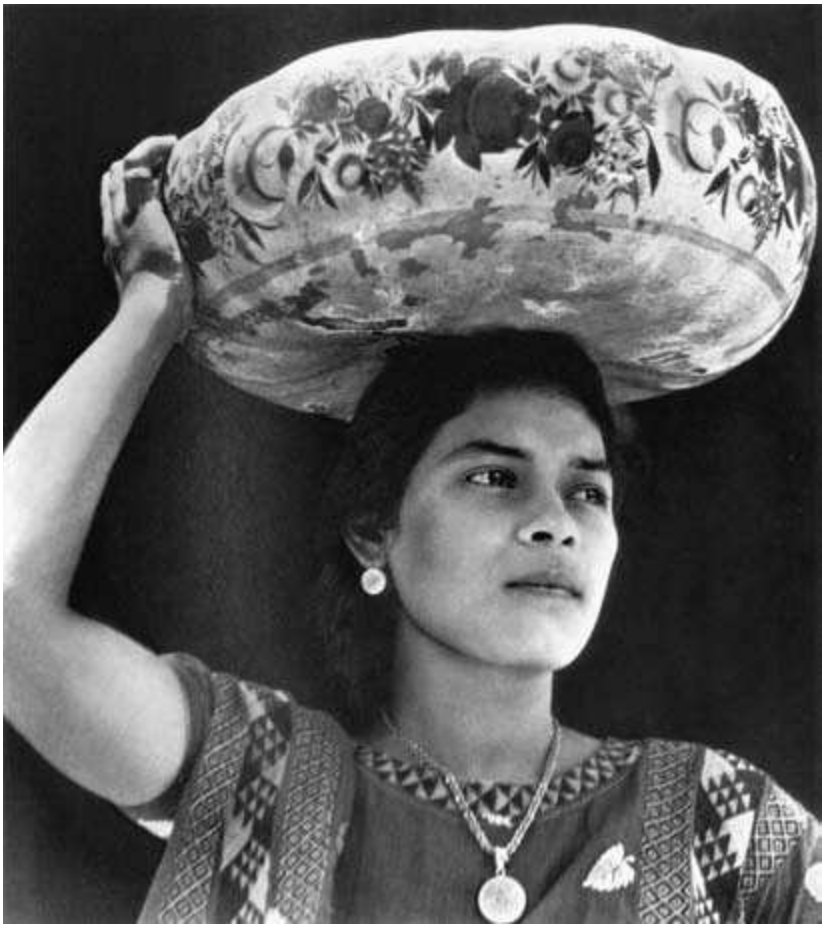

Figure 15. Tina Modotti, "Woman from Tehuantepec," 1929. George Eastman House.

the official organ of the Mexican Communist Party. In addition, she regularly sent her photographs to Moscow, where they accompanied articles on Mexico and Latin America in the journal *Puti MOPR'a*.

Modotti also contributed to the creation of the mythical image of Tehuantepec. In 1929, Modotti took a series of photographs of the Tehuana women. These images are quite different from both the photographs of the harsh life of the poor in the rest of Mexico that Modotti documented, and her more iconic still representations. The Tehuana series depicts beautiful, proud, statuesque women, and evoke the women's enduring dignity and fortitude. One of Modotti's last photographs taken in Mexico is of a Tehuana woman supporting on her head an enormous painted vessel (*yecapixtle*). The picture is taken from a low

Figure 16. Image from "Sandunga." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

vantage point, to suggest the woman's authority and power: the upraised and close-up view conveys a heroic monumentality.

Modotti sent many of her Tehuantepec photographs to Weston in the fall of 1929 for an exhibition he was organizing in the U.S. In a letter to him dated September 17, 1929, she discusses the difficulties involved in photographing her subjects: "I am sending you a few of the snapshots done in T[ehuantepec]. Forgive me, but I am just sending you from the ones I happen to have duplicates on hand, same condition as the ones I am sending you, either messy or moved, all the exposures had to be done in such a hurry, as soon as they saw me with the camera the women would automatically increase their speed of walking; and they walk swiftly by nature."[42] As we shall see later in the chapter, this experience will prove to be very similar to that of Tisse, Alexandrov, and Eisenstein. The series of Tehuantepec photographs taken by Modotti is mirrored almost precisely by many of the shots taken by Eisenstein for "Sandunga," both in terms of the organization of the shots and the impression they convey.

MODOTTI AND KOLLONTAI

Tina Modotti's stay in Mexico in the 1920s overlapped with Alexandra Kollontai's term as the Soviet ambassador in Mexico City, and the two

"Mata Haris" of the revolutionary culture met each other on many occasions.[43] Aside from their shared work for the Communist cause and their affiliation with the Communist International (Modotti later joined the Red Cross section of the Communist International), the two women shared a commitment to the rights of women. Yet both became notorious in Mexico not for their political or artistic work (Kollontai also wrote fiction as another not entirely successful attempt to draw attention to women's issues), but for their alleged loose sexual morals (which, in the case of Kollontai, who was in her fifties during her stay in Mexico, was largely based on her earlier proclamations rather than on any personal actions), their beauty, and their impeccable fashion sense. During the press coverage of the assassination of Modotti's lover, the exiled Cuban communist Julio Antonio Mella, most of the attention of the press was concentrated on Modotti's "dangerous" beauty and speculations that she might have been involved in her lover's murder, based largely on the argument that a woman of loose behavior and such striking good looks must be capable of any crime. Similarly, in the press coverage of Kollontai's appointment as the Soviet ambassador, the first woman ever to serve as an ambassador in Mexico, pages are dedicated to the smallest details of her wardrobe and hairstyle, while only *El Machete* (the official organ of the Communist Party of Mexico) devoted any attention to her accomplishments as a political leader, diplomat, and a known author of several works on political economy. In spite of this reality, both countries did open up a space that allowed some of the great female artists and intellectuals to express themselves and leave their mark. It is not by accident that many of the foreigners who left a significant trace on the history of Mexican postrevolutionary culture were women: Alma Reed, Katherine Anne Porter, Frances Toor, Tina Modotti, and Anita Brenner.

ANITA BRENNER

Brenner was probably the woman whom Eisenstein got to know best in Mexico, where, as is evident from his notes, she served as an important intellectual interlocutor.

When Brenner returned to Mexico in 1923, she quickly got introduced to the artistic and political avant-garde of Mexico through her association with Frances Toor, the editor of the quarterly *Mexican Folkways*. By this time she had already worked with Ernest Gruening and Carleton Beals, and through them became acquainted with radical circles in New York, writing articles about Mexico for the *Nation*, *Jewish Morning Journal*, *The Arts*, and *Mexican Folkways*. Her perspective was formed both from her

own observations and experiences in Mexico (in particular as a journalist and a researcher for Gruening), and from the ideas in circulation among her friends and acquaintances, who read each others' essays and engaged in lively discussions. It was quite an avant-garde circle! Because of the large number of artists and intellectuals who were in one way or another involved with Frances Toor's journal, Brenner found herself at the center of individuals, both Mexican and foreign, who formed the core of what she herself later called the Mexican Renaissance. Among Brenner's friends in the 1920s were Edward Weston and Tina Modotti (who at that point was still posing for Weston, but already working on her own photography); the three great muralists ("los tres grandes," as they later came to be known), Rivera, Siquieros, and Orozco; Jean Charlot, a French painter who had become an important part of the muralist project since 1921, acting as curator, press agent, and historian of the movement; Americans Bertram and Ella Wolf (Bertram organizing for the Mexican Communist Party, Ella working as a TASS correspondent); Roberto Montenegro; and Xavier Guerrero, a Tarahumaran Indian, muralist painter, Rivera's assistant, member of the executive committee of the Mexican Communist Party, and—together with Siqueiros and Rivera—a founding member of the periodical *El Machete* as the organ of the Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos, Pintores y Escultores (The Union of Workers, Painters and Sculptors, which the muralists formed in the early 1920s). Guerrero had a relationship with Tina Modotti from 1924 until 1928, when he left for Moscow to study at the Leninist School, a centre for political instruction, where he remained until 1932. Also in this circle was the revolutionary folk singer Concha Michel (an acquaintance of Kollontai, Michel had gone to the Soviet Union on tour in 1931 and visited Modotti in Moscow), and the anthropologist and painter Miguel Covarrubias, whose caricatures, featured in *Vanity Fair* magazine since 1923, became one of the signature styles of the decade.[44] Many members of this circle would gather again in 1931 around Eisenstein and his crew.

In the course of the 1920s and 1930s, Brenner moved back and forth between New York and Mexico, operating as a general impresario and interpreter for the Mexican arts and for the Mexican Revolution in both countries. In 1927 she got in touch with Frances Flynn Paine, art agent for the Rockefellers, to do an exhibition (which took place in 1928–29 at the Art Center in New York) bringing together the largest number of works by Mexican artists to date, at the same time as she published *Idols Behind Altars*. She went back to Mexico on her honeymoon in 1930, and stayed on to work on her next book, *Your Mexican Holiday* (published in 1932 and including photographs by Eisenstein and Jimenez, among others). It was

thus that Eisenstein's visit to Mexico fortuitously and fortunately crossed with Brenner's itinerary, bringing them together.

If Brenner's story is perhaps the most successful one of the women involved in the intellectual, artistic, and political life of Mexico in this period, it is in large part due to her position as a bohemian with what might be called a "hybrid identity": an American, a Mexican, and a Jew, equally at ease with the artistic and political circles in both Mexico and New York.

On the surface, there was an apparent disconnect between the lives of these women and the women's movement in Mexico of the period, comprising primarily peasant and working-class women and promoting a politics that was colored by nationalism. However, the cultural politics of feminism were intertwined in the twenties with the straightforwardly political aspect of the feminist movement that was on the rise not only in Europe (women received the right to vote in the UK and in Germany in 1918) and in the U.S. (woman received the right to vote in 1920) but, in many guises, was present in nations outside of the Western periphery: for example, in Turkey women were given the right to vote in 1930—fourteen years before they gained suffrage in France; in Iran, dress codes enforcing the veil were lifted in the twenties; and in Japan, women's suffrage groups successfully lobbied to modify laws discriminating against women. On the cultural front, Soviet art of the 1920s, including film, presents some of the most radical and progressive representations of women of that time anywhere in the world, in such works as Abram Room and Victor Shklovsky's film *Bed and Sofa* (*Tretya Meshchanskaya*, 1927). However, the radical impulse in Soviet policies toward family and the role of women weakened considerably within the two years after Kollontai left the country on her diplomatic post in 1925 (arguably, her positions abroad were a way to get rid of her). Thus, the representation of women in Soviet art never attained a very radical level after its promising beginning. Such was also the case in Mexico, where for the most part the postrevolutionary art system followed the old "bourgeois" system of representation, reaffirming woman's role as a mother and caretaker, as well as a symbolic figure, constituting an allegory for the nation, fecundity, or nature (as in the murals). Alternatively, the postrevolution fell into the system of representation typical of the Hollywood films of the film-noir era, where female sexuality is fetishized but associated with a murder deserving punishment (Tina Modotti's story is very emblematic in that respect).[45] The absence of any modern "new women" from *¡Que Viva Mexico!* (in contrast even to Marfa Lapkina's character in *Old and New*) and the abstract images of archetypical female characters that

appear in their place may be seen as the result of the general anxiety governing the artworks of that period, as the existence and the status of female subjectivity became a persistent and formative issue in the process of modernization.[46] Rather than reflecting the influence of any actual women in Mexico, among whom, as noted above, Eisenstein had many acquaintances, "Sandunga" is best referenced by the female iconography employed by Diego Rivera, in particular in the series of murals he painted for the Secretariat of Public Education.

RIVERA'S SEP MURALS

If *Bezhin Meadow*'s murdered mother (and, ultimately, the martyred Stepka) serves as a perfect intertextual image for the "Prologue," "Sandunga" is best referenced by *The Old and the New* (*General'naja Liniia*) and its main protagonist, Marfa, as the embodiment of the new productivity. This semantic link is established most directly through the intertextual connection of "Sandunga" with Diego Rivera's SEP murals. The influence of the SEP murals on *¡Que Viva Mexico!* and on "Sandunga" in particular has been noted by most scholars writing on the film. Anne Nesbet even argues that these murals can be seen as the prototype for the whole film, and as evidence of Eisenstein's new interest in "flat" surfaces.

> The movie (like the country it portrayed) was indeed inspired by preexisting images and in particular . . . Eisenstein's inspiration was a whole series of them, unrolling on an architecturally sophisticated two-dimensional surface. . . . The specific model for this surface was, I believe, The Ministry of Education in Mexico City. . . . The dominance of the Ministry of Education runs somewhat counter to the more elegant idea of dedicating each section to a different artist; although Siqueiros, Orozco and Posada did influence Eisenstein's imagery, it was Rivera's grand images that provided not only specific images, but also the overall structure of the film.[47]

Nesbet's claim can be further expanded by the reference to another series of murals by Rivera, mentioned in a brief description of the film given by the crew to the Mexican government in August 1931:

> This new type of screen art, symphonic cinema: symphonic from the viewpoint of its construction and the way it's put together, can be compared, in a way, with Diego Rivera's work at the National Palace. Similarly to these paintings, our film will present Mexico's social evolution from ancient times to present day, when it emerges as a modern country of liberty and future.[48]

And, finally, the Chapingo Chapel murals (1927) provide another set of intertextual allusions for many of the motifs of the film, especially "Sandunga": here, the fecundity of nature is presented as a precondition of the revolution, with women representing all the elements of nature: the earth itself (*la tierra dormida*), the seeds and the womb protecting the future of the revolution. It was Tina Modotti who modeled for many of these nude images, which bring to mind Concepción at the beginning of "Sandunga." Although it can hardly be disputed that the SEP murals were both part of the original inspiration for the film and perhaps the sources of many specific images in it (although this point is blurred by the fact that Rivera's murals incorporate many traditional Mexican iconographic images and can hardly claim originality), Eisenstein's own reading of Rivera's art, which refers specifically to his Chapingo murals, reveals more about "Sandunga" than merely giving us an ensemble of influences.

"THE PROMETHEUS OF MEXICAN PAINTING"

In Eisenstein's notes for his essay "The Prometheus of Mexican Painting," written during his stay in Mexico (1930–31) and commissioned by Anita Brenner for a publication in the journal *Creative Art*, he uses a series of oppositions to characterize Rivera and Orozco, the other great Mexican muralist painter.[49] He associates Rivera with the Apollonian drive, the horizontal line, the inner speech projected on the horizontal linear plane, and, finally, to "nature's motherhood."[50]

> I would equate Diego with the Mother Earth, with the Mother of all Beings. He is giving birth to his Noah's Ark—an endless stream of animals in human disguise and of people, brought down to the level of animals by exploitation. A womb could be the symbol of the relentless creative ability of this man. Look how in the Chapingo Chapel his symbolism of the Revolution comes out of the depth of the symbolism of Birth: from the dead Zapata, from whose bloody rags come out powerful seeds of the future freedom—through the triptych of the Faith of the Fighters, seen as the growing of the seeds—to the gigantic figure of the Sleeping Earth and the gorgeous Awaking Earth. Fertility. Motherhood. Earth. Again, it's her. And this is, as it were, a boundless, hypersymbolic, concentrated self-portrait powerfully thrown by Diego onto eternal muralist painting. In Mother Earth, Cosmic Fertility incorporates itself in the enormity of Diego's creative power.[51]

It is obvious that "Sandunga" can be read precisely through this semantic cluster of Rivera's art, Mother Earth (natural/agrarian productivity), and the birth of the revolution. However, as the notes for the essay proceed, it becomes clear that *this* is not the model for Eisenstein's own art. For Eisenstein the model is instead in the interaction of "Rivera," and everything that he associates with him, and "Orozco," his exact opposite.

The interaction of Orozco and Rivera results, for Eisenstein, in the synthesis of contemplation and action, of the horizontal and the vertical, of the womb and the phallus, of the feminine and the masculine, the light and the dark, of Apollo and Dionysus, of nature and culture, of a sutured totality. Both, however, are equally crucial for Eisenstein's ideas of art and, by extension, for the revolution itself:

> We love that in which we recognize ourselves. . . . As for myself I love both [Rivera and Orozco] emotionally through myself—this concerns the single road of knowledge. It is between these two poles that I shuttle back and forth. Let me try a quick outline of the polarity of these two great masters. I offer an original response by finding the same polarity at the core of myself and my cinema—of my moving frescoes (for we also work on walls!). *Potemkin* busts through the screen into the auditorium. *The General Line* pulls onto the plane of contemplative space both vertical and horizontal—such is the definition given me by Fernand Leger (see *Le Monde*).[52]

Moreover, only through a synthesis of the two can a work of art transcend the two-dimensionality of the surface of the wall, a synthesis that is only possible through filmmaking: "This is what gives me the possibility of seeing their work *in this way*. This is what forces me to see them *in this way*. Perhaps it is a vision, an Epiphany. Is synthesis possible on a wall? Is it possible for it to contain the furious tension that pulls across its surface like a bow about to let fly its arrow, like a balloon about to burst—can a wall have all this and still be a wall?"[53] This is the dialectic of film form again, mediated this time through the images of the muralist paintings, and coded in terms that are almost explicitly ecstatic and religious (*prozreniie* in Russian is a term for religious insight). This is an example of a move that becomes more familiar to the readers of later Eisenstein, where religious ecstasy—*ekstasis* [*vykhod iz sebia*], in Eisenstein's terms—is the moment of dialectical shift—a refunctionalizing of the term prefigured in other modernist thinkers from the twenties, such as Heidegger, Buber, and Rosenzweig.[54] It is, of course, not surprising that, as Eisenstein tells us, it was in Mexico that he again began to draw, this time "in the proper,

linear way," finding a release of energy in "abstract, encompassing linearity." Concerned as always with the unity of structure and effort, he is at pains to develop this as an analogy to his film work, remarking that in his early films, he had been fascinated by "the mathematically pure course . . . of montage thought and less by the 'thick' stroke of the accentuated shot."[55] Rejecting the notion of Diego Rivera's pronounced linear style as an influence on his own, he invokes instead the whole of Mexican visual culture: from Maya architecture to the prints of Posada. And finally, it was in Mexico, he tells us, that his drawing underwent a catharsis, striving for mathematical abstraction and purity of line. "The effect was considerably enhanced when this abstract, intellectualized line was used for drawing especially sensual relations between human figures usually in especially complicated and random situations!"[56]

While this is not the place to discuss Eisenstein's Mexican drawings—a subject too vast and important to treat in a cursory manner—even a quick glace at their iconography of mutilation, castration, crucifixion, decapitation, repression, abjection, and abasement reveals this statement by Eisenstein as a major understatement. And this is confirmed by their cast of characters, which includes Salome (described by Eisenstein as drinking the blood of the decapitated John the Baptist through a straw) and St. Sebastian. One notes, as well, the brilliant condensation of contemporary Mexican culture through the image of matador and bull impaled together in crucifixion. The understatement nonetheless deserves attention. For the formal graphic catharsis of which he speaks was almost certainly an aspect of a deeper and more general cathartic process in Mexico, where the distance and relaxation of constraints of all sorts—political, social, and sexual—brought a sense of release, facilitating his fascinated, impassioned plunge into Mexican culture.[57]

And it is in this context that Eisenstein abruptly transitions to Siqueiros as someone working on the dialectics of the horizontal and the vertical, taking us back to his use of Siqueiros's mural in his "Prologue," itself embodying the other dialectic—not the spatial, in this case, but the temporal one synthesizing the historical process that captures in the present the recapitulation of all evolutionary stages.

Thus, without underestimating the significance of specific murals by Rivera on the making of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* it is important to see Rivera's images as only one side of the intended synthesis that Eisenstein was hoping to achieve through his film. At the same time, it seems that of all the novellas, "Sandunga" best embodies the qualities that Eisenstein in "Prometheus" associates with Rivera and the SEP murals: the natural, the horizontal, the feminine.[58]

Figure 17. Eduard Tisse, Sergei M. Eisenstein, and Adolfo Best Maugard, shooting in Tehuantepec, January–March 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

The female protagonists of "Sandunga," who supposedly rule the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, are in fact mere abstractions, figures and narrative locations rather than characters. This is not surprising, for there is no mention of any real female historical characters anywhere in Eisenstein's film or in his writings on Mexico, as if they barely existed for him, clearly surpassed by the power of the figures and abstractions that make of "woman" an ahistorical figure, the "eternally feminine," who operates throughout as a stand-in for Eisenstein's theories. There is an irony to the circumstance that, according to Kimbrough's account of the shooting in Tehuantepec, "the first day [the crew was] threatened by a group of men who said our cameras were machines that enabled us to look through women's clothes"—a strange twist on the alleged rule of women, who, in the "Sandunga" footage, spend at least part of their time moving about bare breasted, and the rest of the time clearly enjoy freedoms usually allotted to men in patriarchal societies.[59] Eisenstein never comments on this event anywhere in his writing; it clearly went unnoticed by him, never impinging in any way on his schema that required Oaxaca to stand for a matriarchy ruled by women. The real women who were not allowed by men to pose in front of the camera were hardly the point—on the screen they were to be transformed into allegorical figures of fertility, of preclass society, of the prelogical circuit between the womb and the tomb. It is in the following novellas—"Fiesta"

and "Maguey"—that real historically particularized protagonists appear, and they will embody a baroque homoerotic and bisexual aesthetic. The following chapter will take up these themes in detail.

Figure 18. Hunter Kimbrough in Tehuantepec, January–March 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

3

"GOING ALL THE WAY"

"FIESTA" AND "MAGUEY"

These Russians are absolutely crazy about the bullfights, fiestas and funerals. —HUNTER KIMBROUGH TO UPTON SINCLAIR, August 31, 1931, Mexico City[1]

You know that I never went all the way with these love objects . . . After taking a certain fact to 99% and stopping there out of indecisiveness, you cannot even imagine what it means to suddenly take it to a 100%! . . . Now it's a question of going into more depth on the matter, although the most important event has already happened. —SERGEI EISENSTEIN TO PERA ATASHEVA, November 25, 1931, Mexico City[2]

This chapter focuses on the second and third intended novellas of *¡Que Viva Mexico!*—"Fiesta" and "Maguey"—beginning its exploration with Eisenstein's aestheticization of a male body and homoeroticism, which this chapter links to the baroque and neobaroque aesthetic. It further links Eisenstein's baroque perception to a strand of visual motifs from these two novellas, and further to the development of Eisenstein's concepts of protoplasm and bisex and to his theorization of his sexual experiences.

The material for the film's second novella, "Fiesta," consists of: extended footage of a bullfight, part documentary, part staged; a sequence taking place in the romantic floating gardens of Xochimilco; documentary footage of the celebration of the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe; a recreation of an old Mexican ritual that includes simulation of the suffering of Christ; and various images of baroque churches and artifacts in Mexico. The following novella, "Maguey," is the only one in the film that follows a strict narrative logic: it presents a story of a rebellion by the peons on an old pulque hacienda in central Mexico. The rebellion is triggered by the rape of Maria, the fiancée of one of the peons, Sebastian, by the wealthy friends of the hacienda owner, and it results in the death of the hacendado's sister and a particularly cruel execution of the rebellious peons.

My choice to read these two episodes together, although there is no doubt that they were intended as separate novellas, stems from the following reasons. First, the intended order of the sequence of the two episodes is unclear: in some versions of the libretto "Maguey" follows "Fiesta," but in others the order is reversed.[3] We know from Eisenstein's notes that he considered intercutting the shots of the execution of Sebastian from "Maguey" with the scenes depicting religious ecstasy in "Fiesta," thus breaking the autonomy of the two novellas. Although this parallel cut was not included in any of the reconstructions of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* it would provide a very important juncture between the two episodes, allowing for an explicit connection between sadism/masochism and religious ecstasy. This chapter will pursue this juncture further.

Both novellas take place at the same time in Mexican history (during the *Porfiriato*, the reign of the dictator Porfirio Diaz). Both episodes also serve as a direct illustration of the premise in Brenner's *Idols Behind Altars* regarding the permanence of the indigenous culture and rituals behind the Spanish colonial ceremonies and customs, both of which are marked by a baroque excess.

Finally, stylistically, the two are constantly linked by the visual motif of punctures: the picador in the bullfight sequence, the self-inflicted wounds of the Christ imitators, and the puncturing of the maguey plants. The visual motif of puncture into the flesh also serves as a link between the theme of sadism/masochism/cruelty and religious ecstasy.

What marks "Fiesta" and "Maguey" are the particular kinds of cruelty depicted, a cruelty that verges on sadism and masochism; we see this in the bullfight, in the religious ceremonies, in the treatment of the peons, and the homoeroticism in the representation of the male body. Both the cruelty and the homoeroticism are linked to the experience of ecstasy:

religious, sexual, and artistic. Both episodes draw heavily on the baroque as an artistic style. In "Fiesta" this influence takes the form of the historical baroque in the architecture of colonial Mexico, and in "Maguey" it finds its way into the visual texts through constant allusions to the visual representation of St. Sebastian, so characteristic of baroque painting.

BAROQUE PERCEPTION

¡Que Viva Mexico! stages the topic of the baroque in some obvious ways, notably in capturing the baroque architecture that is so much a part of the colonial heritage of Mexico. While being geographically and temporally removed from its European "origin," Mexican baroque became the embodiment of the colonial era in the Americas as well as a belated culmination of the baroque style itself. In the words of art historian Robert Harbison: "Mexican craftsmen caught the exuberance and the excess of Baroque even if the fine points . . . were lost or misunderstood. By this route and using this conception of the style's essence, emphasizing its exuberance and incorrectness, one can say that Mexican Baroque is the most complete fulfillment of Baroque perception."[4]

The visual centrality of the baroque to the Mexican architecture and art did not escape Eisenstein, who consistently turns to the baroque in his writings about the film. He furthermore identifies the visual aesthetic of the film itself as baroque.

> Monumental simplicity and unrestrained Baroque (in each of its aspects, Spanish and Aztec) . . . The duality of these attractions finds expression again in my enthusiasm both for the severity of the peon's white costume (a costume that, in both its color and rectilinear silhouette, seems to be the tabula rasa of costumes in general) and for the sculpturesque sequence of gold and silver bas-reliefs, overloaded with gold embroidery, burning on blue, green, orange, and puce satin, that appear under the black hats of the heroic participants of the corridas.
>
> This superabundance was combined with the wealth of capes and black and white lace mantillas of their lady admirers, of tall, Spanish combs, of fans playing and gleaming . . .
>
> One was as dear to me as the other. I felt as much in harmony with one as with the other. And I delved into the mass of both by means of Eduard Tisse's incomparable camera.[5]

In this passage from the notes written in the last year of his life about his experience in Mexico, Eisenstein refers to the baroque qualities of the images in *¡Que Viva Mexico!*—conflating both its "Spanish" and "Aztec"

Figure 19. Sergei Esenstein and Eduard Tisse shooting in Oaxaca, January 1931. Olivier Debroise collection, Mexico City.

aspects as equally "baroque." This equation of the stylistic qualities of pre-Hispanic Mexican art with the conventionally recognized historical baroque in Mexico not only acknowledges the uniqueness of the "Indian baroque" as a hybrid form, but also reaffirms an understanding of the baroque not as a strictly historical phenomenon or even, to use Jose Antonio Maravall's phrase, as a "historical epoch,"[6] but as a distinct aesthetic mode. This notion prefigures such usage of the term in the twentieth century in general, when, in Gregg Lambert's words, "the term 'baroque' has gradually come to designate, rather than a particular historical period in the European art history, an effect which results from the composition of specific traits around the adjectival terms *baroque*, *barroco* and *neo-barroco*. In other words, it designates less a particular historical duration than a manner of style of composition."[7] Eisenstein later claimed that the pre-Columbian Mexican cultures exemplified the baroque excess as much as the historical baroque itself, that the two merge and compete in scale, making Mexico the most monumental as well as the most baroque visual culture:

> But in me this tendency toward monumentalism of form coexists with the most attentive passion for the overdone baroque piling-up of the details. To state it beautifully—the Indian Gopuram fascinates me equally by the elegance of its silhouette as by the wild chaos of

Figure 20. Sergei Eisenstein, Mexico, 1931–32. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

> the heaping up of the smallest detail, which constitute it from a close-up, like the shelves of the shops and stores of random things or props storage, whose dusty and sticky smell I like equally in theater and on the floors of the film studio. And here Mexico throws it all together at you—the wildest Baroque of Spain in its wildest form of Churubusco, multiplied by the inflamed imagination of the tropics, which, in their turn, gave birth to its own Baroque which is not four hundred years old, but rather two, three, or four thousand years old. Neither Spain nor Italy knows, of course, such flow of the lava of imagination as that which is stretched out on the friezes of Chichen-Itza, the bas-relief of Papaitla, or the diggings of the Central Plateau.[8]

What is particularly remarkable in this passage is Eisenstein's drawing together the baroque as a historical artistic style with reference to Spain and Italy, the "baroque" qualities of pre-Columbian art, the world of consumer objects, the artificiality of artistic production in its theatricality, and, finally, film. This baroque quality of Eisenstein's imagery led to criticisms from his contemporaries early on in regard to his other films, especially *October*.[9]

What is even more characteristic of Eisenstein, however, is the way the baroque moves from being a descriptive label (both in relation to

Mexico and in relation to his film) to being a subjective attitude on the part of the director: "both [the 'historical' baroque and its pre-Columbian equivalent] were dear and resonant to me." He further inserts himself—his own person, not merely his work—into the baroque: "I resonated in both."[10] The boundaries between historical phenomena (the historical baroque), aesthetic mode (the Aztec monumentalism and ornamentalism; the Mexican baroque), and his own personality are forcefully blurred; an interchange takes place between the outer and the inner; Eisenstein's discourse itself embodies the baroque *furor* as estrangement and as ex-stasis. The verb *vgryzat'sia* in the original text—literally, "to get one's teeth onto something," used as a description of the camera work, suggests a cruel and sadistic quality to this act (properties Eisenstein identified with the baroque); but even more importantly, this image suggests the provisional suspension of the boundaries between the subject and an object, between the artwork and the spectator's physical body, and finally between the object, the spectator, and the author (with Eisenstein, here, acting as both a spectator of the baroque spectacle in Mexico and a creator of a baroque work of art, his film). This physical impact of a baroque work of art as an appeal to the sensory, seducing the mass audience, is certainly something Eisenstein shared with both baroque architecture and spectacle. It has been noted elsewhere that the emergence of cultural spectacle characteristic of the historical baroque invites comparison to (if not designated as the originary impulse of) modern/contemporary spectacle, from advertisement to political propaganda.[11] Never, perhaps, was this more striking than in the case of Soviet culture of the 1920s and 1930s, with its infamous blurring of the boundaries between "life and politics," a culture of which Eisenstein was certainly a key ideologue as well as the most famous participant. Early Soviet cinema in particular had roots in the mass spectacles, many of which were taking place in Petrograd/Leningrad at the time. Eisenstein's theory of montage of attractions, which is at the core of his film theory, and in particular the notion of the *cine-fist* as a mode of directly impacting the spectator, can be seen as a perfect baroque tool, "where the body of the spectator becomes the extension of the cultural work: The body of the spectator—meaning both the physical and emotional surfaces of the aesthetic representation—can be understood to comprise the extended materiality of the art-work itself."[12] In this sense, it is not merely a terminological coincidence that Eisenstein's use of the term "montage of attraction" overlaps with the contemporary tendency to frame early (prenarrative) cinema as a cinema of attraction. Tom Gunning analyzes the relationship between the spectacle and the

audience of early cinema, especially in the so-called phantom rides, i.e., films taken from trains and other moving vehicles, which is remarkably similar to the baroque affect: "As the phantom ride seemingly achieves a complete grasp and penetration of a landscape, this new technological sublime simultaneously encounters a sense of loss, of dissolution, a phantomization of the experience of self and world. Thus the dawn of cinema, rather than simply perfecting a new technology for the portrayal of landscapes, also inaugurates a new representation of loss in which the *pas de deux* of spectator and landscape becomes a ghostly dance of presence and absence, sensation and distance."[13] In other words, the perceptual apparatus of the phantom rides constructs a double movement. First, there is the seeming intrusion of the (imagined) physical body of the spectator into the landscape, producing the shock—or, to put it in baroque terms, *furor*, what Eisenstein meant by the *cine-fist* and later by his insistence on pathos as the key aesthetic category in his filmmaking—of the imaginary collision between the diagesis and the spectator. But simultaneous with this projection is the actual impossibility of the spectator's participation, which is recorded by the consciousness of the spectator as well, underscoring the absence upon which the immateriality of the cinematic image rests; a metaphysical absence that underscores the sense of loss. It is an event that contains its absence as such. The worldview of a society and culture in/of crisis, which shaped the baroque ethos of the seventeenth century, seems to have returned in the late nineteenth century as though history were cyclical, positioning itself in confrontation with modernity. The idea that "cinema of attractions" was visually structured through the baroque (rather than Renaissance) perceptual apparatus further connects it to Eisenstein, whose aesthetic throughout his oeuvre was based on the rejection of realism in the sense of the optical reproduction of the Renaissance perspective. This is particularly obvious in the footage of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* with its distorted flattened surfaces and emphasis on ornamental detail tending towards the haptical abstraction.[14] It was this tendency in Eisenstein that, a few years prior to the making of the Mexican film, led Viktor Shklovsky to criticize *October* (*Oktyabr'*, 1928) as "a catalogue of inventions arranged in some unknown order … an accumulation of bits and … close-up shots." Shklovsky attacked Eisenstein for his "pettification of the Revolution" and for the creation of "the Soviet Baroque style of film" where "… beyond the objects one could not see the 'insignificant' event of the October Revolution,"[15] thus placing the baroque on the opposite spectrum from the "true revolutionary" aesthetics. As Shklovsky's quote makes apparent,

Eisenstein's appropriation of the baroque appears problematic given the Russian and Soviet context of this issue: the modernist reappraisal of baroque architecture and art that took place in the late nineteenth century belonged to a cultural tradition specifically rejected by postrevolutionary Soviet avant-gardists such as Eisenstein. Unless one reads the postrevolutionary emphasis on public spectacles and, later on, the Stalinist emphasis on the aestheticization of the political as an extension of the baroque tradition (a position that, although not impossible, requires a very complex and detailed analysis), the attribution of Eisenstein's work to the baroque or neobaroque style is quite unique in Soviet cultural history, and requires a more in-depth investigation that would go beyond a mere list of attributes. I would like to suggest that it is not merely a coincidence, however, that the baroque aspect of Eisenstein's work came out with particular force during his stay in Mexico.

"FIESTA"

In contrast to "Sandunga," where the feminine figure and her clothing are at the center of the spectacle (because or in spite of the matriarchal order) and men are presented as passive erotic and aesthetic objects of economic exchange, the following novella, "Fiesta," places men in the very center of the narrative as well as in the visual center of the episode. Contrary to what may be expected, it is within the more "traditional" (i.e., patriarchal) order that the gender representation changes even more radically, and male figures become the locus of the voyeuristic instinct and the embodiment of the feminine. Males in "Fiesta" are coded as feminine through the emphasis on the sensuality of their bodies and their ornate costumes and accessories. The visual elements of baroque aesthetics in "Fiesta" provide a perfect framework for this gender reversal. The overabundance of visual detail, the artificiality and theatricality of the settings and the figures in "Fiesta" replace the emphasis that we saw in "Sandunga" on natural splendor. The Spanish colonial traditions and rituals come to the fore, and the gender composition changes. Both the indigenous culture and women, consistently associated with the primitive, become the background, while male figures in Spanish baroque settings take prominence. In the meantime, just as the pre-Hispanic idols are clearly present and recognizable behind altars in the religious ceremonies and traditions, the feminine figures hover over the narrative of "Fiesta" and "Maguey," acquiring an even more symbolic and allegorical status than in the earlier episodes. Images of the Virgin Mary preside over the narrative, appearing now as sculptures

and statues, now as the mother of the toreadors in "Fiesta," who gives them her blessing before the bullfight. But men—their bodies and their ornate dress—are the visual center of these novellas.

THE BULLFIGHT

As Eisenstein often mentioned in his correspondence and his memoirs, the Mexican bullfight made one of the strongest impressions on the director. This is how he describes it in a letter to his friends Maxim Shtraukh and Ilya Trauberg:

> The first "killer" impression is a bullfight. An absolutely incredible spectacle! The work is exceptionally "elegant." All 30 thousand get up and roar to a brilliant move of a "toreador." And lots of blood, which is always good to see. What's funny is that there is the "disqualification" of a bull—if a bull isn't hot enough, all leave the arena and the 5 bulls with gigantic dull bells around their necks, and a shepherd who herds the whole bunch back with a guilty look. The disqualification is demanded by roaring, addressed to the judge's balcony—they then respond with a trumpet, after which the bull is "shamed." Cock fights are also terribly fun. Mainly because of the players. They bet hundreds and get terribly excited. They tie knives to the legs of the cocks who then cut themselves terribly. During the bullfight, bulls (8) mauled 3 horses to death.[16]

This impression is further confirmed in a letter to Ivor Montague: "The greatest thing I saw here—is the bullfight—I know you would object to such a treatment toward those beasts—but you must forgive me *this* sinful passion, as you forgave me so many other mean feelings nesting in my heart!"[17]

After attending several bullfights in Mexico City upon his arrival in Mexico, Eisenstein contacted a very young Spanish toreador, David Liceaga, and offered him a significant amount of money to be in the film. The footage for "Fiesta" was meant to depict the colonial culture in Mexico in syncretism with its pre-Columbian roots, and most of it was shot in Yucatán in the spring of 1931, except for the footage of the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, shot in Mexico City and its environs on December 12, 1930. Most of the assorted footage of the churches was shot in the state of Puebla. While in Yucatán, after shooting all the on-location footage for "Prologue" in the ruins of Chitchen Itza, Eisenstein and the crew went to Mérida to film David Liceaga.[18] Some of the other footage is from Mexico City. The bullfight was shot with almost no cuts,

in very long takes, very uncharacteristic of Eisenstein's style of previous years. Unlike most of the material for the film, the footage of the bullfight is continuous, uninterrupted, and uncontrolled—one gets an impression that Eisenstein himself was so fascinated with the spectacle that he wanted to catch every moment of the fight and the toreador's every movement. I will suggest here that the reason for the Soviet director's fascination with the bullfight was because it afforded a unique combination of all the elements that interested Eisenstein at the time: ecstatic experiences, a proximity to death, homoerotic elements of the spectacle, decorative excess, and the tension between the artificiality of the spectacle and the its centrality in the forces of nature, represented by the bull.

The footage consists of both documentary material from the real bullfight, including many shots of the audience, and staged sequences—the dramatizations of the more exciting and dangerous elements of the *corrida*, which would have been impossible to shoot as close as would be necessary. The close-ups of Liceaga and his close encounters with the bull are shot as if from above the bull's head—in fact, it was Eisenstein's directorial assistant, Grigorii Alexandrov, who was dressed up as a bull with horns on his head. In a brilliant instance of behind-the-scenes situational rhyme, Alexandrov's playing the bull is mirrored by the scene in "Maguey" in which the peons are playing with a giant papier-mâché figure of a bull—*el torrito*—to divert attention from their attempts to set the hacienda on fire. These staged close-ups give an impression of point-of-view shots through the eyes of the bull; the camera identifies with the animal, aligning itself to the natural world. This technique also makes the torero, rather than the bull, the center of the spectacle.

The images of the audience at the bullfight suggest a link between the spectacle provided by the bullfight and Eisenstein's own theory of attraction. Oksana Bulgakowa summarizes the elements of Eisenstein's concept of attraction as being composed of the following:

> the direct shock-effect that comes with such phenomena as the representation of violence, the stimulation of fear, surprise, and so forth;
>
> physiological changes that can be achieved in the muscles of the spectators through the new school of acting, based on Eisenstein's concept of expressive movement;
>
> emotional ambiguity (the spectator must be forced relentlessly into an emotional state where the emotions shift constantly; Eisenstein called this kind of stimulus "compound attraction" and refers to lyric and grotesque moments in the films of Charlie Chaplin and to pathos and sadism in religious ecstasy).[19]

A bullfight is a perfect attraction, and affects the audience in similar way. We should recall the use of the bull in *Strike*, and, in a more ironic manner, the bull in *The General Line*. The audience's eyes follow the movements of the bull in a collective synchronicity motivated by pathos. This arrangement is very close to Eisenstein's description of the way that the shock of the montage of attractions should work.[20] This connection may also explain why Eisenstein attached special significance to the shots of the audience reaction in his letter to Sinclair, in which, in the discussion of the importance of the entire visual material for the film and, hence, his unwillingness to limit the footage to what had already been shot, Eisenstein claims that "for instance if we do not get shots of reactions of the audience the bullfight as an impressive part is *lost*."[21]

This long sequence of the bullfight brings out and emphasizes the spectacular aspects of Eisenstein's imagery. The sequence begins with the elaborate rituals surrounding the dressing up of the toreros: the camera lingers on the ornate decorations of their complicated clothing, including many close-ups of the lace and gold ornamentation, which is further mirrored by the gold detailing on the furniture in the room. From the beginning the torero appears as a passive, aesthetic, feminized, object: he is dressed up, as a noble dame would be by her lady-in-waiting, all the way from his stockings to his hair. At the end of this elaborate ritual, the toreros visit their "mother" to ask her for her blessing—or could it be for the approval of their wardrobe? And, finally, prayers are said to the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose image towers over the whole scene. She is as visually excessive and ornate as the clothes of the toreros. The visual excess of the lace and gold on the torero's clothing is matched by the artifice of the choreography of the bullfight, which is rendered as an elaborate performance, a dance in which deviation from the precision of movement can result in death.

Of course, none of these elements are merely a feature of Eisenstein's representation but rather give emphasis and close attention to something that is part of the aesthetics of the bullfight itself. It is an art form in which, uncharacteristically, man becomes the center of a sensual spectacle, thus acquiring most of its feminine features. In some ways a torero is a vision of perfect androgyny, combining feminine and masculine attributes. He is aestheticized, constituting at the same time a passive object of the "being-looked-at-ness" (to borrow Mulvey's famous term), a spectacle of grace and beauty, adorned with various decorations, and yet an active agent who is virile and courageous, and who challenges the forces of nature. There is a visual equivalence established between the shots of Liceaga's ornamental clothing and the lace and gold of the rich

Figure 21. Eduard Tisse, Sergei Eisenstein, Hunter Kimbrough, Grigori Alexandrov, and the actresses for "Fiesta," Izamal, Yucatán, April 21, 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

women watching the bullfight from the balconies, whose love the toreros are trying to win by defeating the bull.

The narrative of a bullfight from the feminist point of view can be read as a repetition of the Oedipal story—as a narrative about the formation of the masculine subject and about the subject further asserting his masculinity. These are versions of a traditional narrative that is common to all myths and stories: the murder of a monster representing threatening forces of nature, so often associated with the representation of dangerous femininity, which establishes the hero as worthy of the love of a woman, who is the ultimate prize. This element is emphasized in the film by the intended subplot, where the younger torero—the picador Baronita—has an adulterous affair with one of the ladies watching the bullfight from the balcony, Senora Calderon. Eisenstein ended up replacing this subplot instead with the depiction of Baronita's defeat by the bull, and a subsequent romantic thrust between Liceaga, Sra Calderon, and another woman on a boat in Xochimilco, which, although presented in a much less ironic manner, points to the woman as the prize of a victory in the bullfight. However, in the bullfight the hero's masculinity is asserted not only through the ultimate defeat of the beast, but through the elegance and grace of the choreography involved in bullfighting, and thus by way

of his femininity. The positioning of the male hero as a passive aesthetic and sensual object is emphasized in the scene on a boat in Xochimilco, where the two women are clearly wooing Liceaga, who is as passive and inactive as the men in the matriarchal society of Tehuantepec.

The bullfight in "Fiesta" is also the site of homosexual propositioning: there is a comic sequence of an exchange between an older, fat, well-dressed man and a very young, working-class Mexican, who rejects his homosexual advances.[22] This footage was not included in Alexandrov's version. Especially noticeable in the scene are the exaggerated eye movements and gestures, reminiscent of *Strike* and of Meyerholdian theater. The scene reads as an allegory of the rich and decadent Mexican bourgeois attempting to corrupt the young working class—but the reference to homosexuality is puzzling, to say the least, and moreover extremely ironic given that we know from Eisenstein's correspondence (in his letters to his wife, Pera Atasheva, and also from the letters addressed to him) that it was in Mexico that he "went all the way" in his own homosexual experience with a young Mexican man (something to which we will return later in this chapter). And yet this sequence in "Fiesta" certainly aligns homosexuality with a lack of revolutionary virility, which the object of homosexual desire embodies.

We will return to the issue of bisexuality and explore it in more detail later in the chapter. For now, let us notice how the manifestation of androgyny overlaps and coincides with several other manifestations in the episode: the death drive (or, in a larger sense, the proximity of death and its incorporation into rituals and spectacles) behind the dangerous spectacle of the bullfight, where death is imminent for either the bull or the torero; the artistic spectacle, which the bullfight exemplifies, and the effect it has on the audience; and the class structure revealed through it by drawing attention to the class divisions among the audience.

Not only do the feminine and masculine attributes interchange in this spectacle, but there is also a subtle play between nature and art/artifice. One of the moves of the toreros that Eisenstein was particularly fascinated by and that he filmed in many variants was the so-called butterfly step—*el paso mariposa*. The bullfighter flicks his cape in a way that resembles the movements of butterfly wings, and this motion attracts the bull. The imitation of nature in this highly theatrical and artificial spectacle must have appealed to Eisenstein because it establishes a certain equivalence between art and nature. This was an idea particularly appealing to the Soviet director, who was always looking for ways to present additional parallels and equivalences among the various phenomena in order to arrive at a single method that would govern it all. He came to conceive of

these instances of mimicry of nature in art as retaining traces of animism from earlier cultures, and saw them as evidencing, once again, a prelogical consciousness, which is further characterized by its plasticity and the ability to transform.[23]

TRANSFORMATIVE POWERS OF ART AS RELATED TO MYTH

In the essay *Magiia Iskusstva* (1947), which was meant to be included in his final collection, *Method*, Eisenstein identifies the conquest of man over nature—which most ancient myths deal with and most rituals embody—as the foundation for artistic creation. He links this attribute of prelogical thinking to his theories of the theater of attraction, developed in the early 1920s as part of the Left Art (LEF) movement, where the visceral effect of the spectacle on the audience is what allows art to transcend its role as representation and become an act of willpower and the conquest over the psyche of the spectator.

> My very approach has carried and still carries an exact trace of the earliest way of dealing with ritual, the predecessor of art; that is:
>
> To conquer—to subject to force—to subjugate to one's will.
>
> There (and then)—nature and the forces of nature.
>
> Here—the psychology (and feelings) of the spectator, and by means of this metamorphosis to conquer his ideology. . . .
>
> Art has always been presented as "one of the instruments of violence"—always as a tool (weapon) for the transformation of the world through the work on the human consciousness.[24]

If progressive, or revolutionary, or true art itself is a form of violence, which this passage claims, and it is rooted in the early forms of thinking best manifested through primitive rituals and art forms, then, indeed, the most effective way of understanding this mechanism is through "regress" (Eisenstein's term) to these earlier forms. These forms are, among other things, characterized by the lack of differentiation brought about by logical thinking. In the prelogical consciousness, according to Eisenstein, all the distinctions are blurred: between men and women, between art and nature. Blurring the line between nature and art is inherent in the butterfly step in corrida, and the metamorphosis between the animal and the human acts as a transgression of norms, aesthetic and social. This transgression—which Eisenstein understands not so much as a transgression but as a regression to the prelogical onto the "progressive," i.e., logical order—is what allows for the metamorphosis, the state of becoming, the dialectical shift to which we have been alluding throughout. What

Eisenstein always strives for in his work is presenting image and subject in an endless state of becoming (Lacan's "*sujet-en-proces*"), of overcoming matter, involved in the dialectical breakthrough. This process of becoming, which Eisenstein refers to in his writing as "ex-stasis," the ecstatic experience, is the way to achieve this transformation. The violent experience associated with it is therefore necessary in order for art to have transformative, rather than merely representational, function. This, however, disrupts the static order of things and thus constitutes transgression of the norm. Sadism and cruelty, which characterize much of "Fiesta" and "Maguey," infused with martyrdom and sacrifice are primary forms of such transgression through which a dialectical shift takes place: the thing turns out to be its opposite. Sacrifice is a perfect example of this, where through the effort of collective will, death gives birth to eternal life, and inflicting suffering is a way of achieving bliss.

> And that is why, repeating in the formation of the work of art not only the reflection of facts but also the dynamics of the processes—this grandiose and excellent path toward the new life, new concepts and ideas—precisely this thought—not as a formula, but as a living and vivid image—has blossomed as the main theme, having been born out of the chaos of endless intersection of episodes and facts, rituals and customs, anecdotes and situations in which [one can see] the working of life and death which cross their paths in Mexico as in no other place. Sometimes through tragic images of death, destroying life.
>
> Sometimes through gorgeous images of life's triumph over death; sometimes through the doomed dying of the biologically-limited;
>
> sometimes through the vastness of socially-eternal born out of the palaces of the hereafter; the future which is born out of the sacrificial blood of what's been killed today; the game of life and death; their competition.[25]

Writing to Ilya Trauberg about his work in Tetlapayac, Eisenstein discusses this fusion of artistic and intellectual creativity and cruelty:

> The vigor of our so-called creativity lies in the dialectical fusion of "blood" and "iron"!!! This becomes monstrous only when there is a break in the creative process, and during moments of rest. Oh, I wish I could only produce without rest! . . . To put it more simply, the theoretical work continues without interruption. Analytic methods of great refinement and endless synthetic amplifications present themselves on the most curious occasions (crocodile hunting or at Indian dances involving turkeys, during which each dancer has to

strangle a live turkey—there are twelve dancers, the one who does not succeed in wringing his turkey's neck is beaten up by the other eleven! We could not film it!!! And other similar attractions). If only I had time to explore *Quetzacoatl*, *Kukulcan*, and other Mexican gods, to be able to set it all down in a book.[26]

IDOLS BEHIND ALTARS

While the primitive in "Sandunga" was filtered through Christian myths of paradise and of the birth of Christ, in a characteristic reversal the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe is mediated through Aztec mythology with its Awesome Mother of Gods. The Catholic celebration itself is inscribed in the physical and symbolic space of pre-Columbian civilization, thus once again emphasizing the constructed nature of this part of the Mexican national identity, and simultaneously reinforcing the organic myth of nationhood and subverting it by showing it as carefully constructed. Eisenstein chose the images, which are now commonly attributed to what is known in Mexican art history as the Indian Baroque: the Indian dancers celebrating the Virgin of Guadalupe with ritual dances that preceded the conquest by many centuries; and images of the church of *la Virgen de los Remedios* in Cholula, Puebla, which was built on the foundation of the largest pyramid on the American continent, and where the faces of the cherubs decorating the walls of the interior have distinctly Indian features. The episode serves as an illustration to Anita Brenner's thesis in *Idols Behind Altars* that the primitive indigenous culture and the criollo neither coexist nor fuse; instead, they are inscribed one within the other and are mediated through each other, both in constant conflict and yet inseparable from each other.[27] The spatial construction of the scenes seems to reinforce both at once, explicitly the continuity of Mexican culture, and implicitly the rupture brought by the conquest and the conflict between the indigenous and Hispanic cultures (and, conversely, the modern and premodern modes of life).[28]

While visually the episode is characterized by the representation of the sensuality of male bodies, the whole section of "Fiesta" is framed conceptually by a female figure of the mother: the Virgin of Guadalupe; the Aztec Mother of Gods, alluded to in the Aztec ceremonies; and the "mother" of the matadors, all of whom imply a mutual equivalence. According to Marie Seton's biography of Eisenstein, the mother of the matadors was chosen to look exactly like Julia Eisenstein, to emphasize the fact that she was to be his prototype of a mother.[29] Seton also comments that he often mentioned that since childhood he had completely identified images of

the Virgin with his mother because she was "equally remote." Once again, the choice of these inserted personal references in the film further points to the autobiographical element in the film: before it became the embodiment of his failure and the biggest personal and artistic tragedy of his life, the Mexican film was already personally invested and was to entail a projection of his own interiority onto the Mexican landscape. As he states in his memoirs: "During my first encounter with Mexico, it seemed to me to be, in all the variety of its contradictions, a sort of outward projection of all those individual lines and features which I carried and carry within me like a tangle of complexes."[30] And even more explicitly in the letter to Esfir Shub: "Mexico is astonishing, especially for me. Picture to yourself a country across which is stretched . . . my personality! You already know its diapason, from one ugly feature to another, and the contrast of all my passions and interests."[31] Eisenstein then goes on to name as these "inclinations and interests": monumentality, the baroque, the ecstatic paranormal experiences of the human consciousness, cruelty and sadism, and the overcoming of death.

The men in "Fiesta" are narratively and visually enclosed within a feminine, more powerful space, as if in a womb. This construction underlines both continuity of gender (men as part of a woman, and so on) and the link between the womb and the tomb. Moreover, in his writing Eisenstein often links religious feeling to the return to the womb, much along the lines of Freud's argument about oceanic feeling. As Jean Charlot testifies in his letter to Marie Seton, "Concerning mystics, E. tried to rationalize by comparing the desire to rest 'in the bosom of Abraham' to the medical state in which adults, in their wish to return to the womb, adopt fetal positions. He made at least one symbolical drawing on those lines. It did not get him very far."[32] The paradise myth and its relation to the matriarchy explored in "Sandunga" are one manifestation of this idea; the Catholic practices depicted in "Fiesta" are another.

But in his (faulty) critique of Freud, Eisenstein accuses psychoanalysis of a lack of attention to the social and political spheres, of not extending the correctly deduced principle of how human consciousness works onto the political. For Eisenstein, religious ecstasy and the return to the mother's womb are equivalent because they are both examples involving a change of states, a state of becoming, and a dialectical shift. In this sense, resurrection and revolution are linked in a similar manner.[33] This connection allows Eisenstein to make a transition and draw a parallel between the bullfight, the religious ecstasy of Christ imitators, pre-Columbian rituals, and what he posits as the first seeds of the Mexican Revolution—the revolt of the peons in "Maguey"—making

an explicit link between states of individual consciousness such as religious experiences, cultural practices such as the bullfight, and political activities.

"MAGUEY"

"Maguey" is the episode that has the most traditional narrative structure and is thus much easier to summarize. It opens with the peons at the hacienda singing a mournful song before going to work on the maguey fields. This is followed by scenes of the extraction of maguey juice to make pulque: the peons have to suck in the juice from the plant with long-fitted calabashes. Later in the day one of the peons, Sebastian, goes to present his fiancée, Maria, to the owner (*hacendado*), as custom requires. The guards do not let him in, so he remains in the front yard while Maria is greeted by the hacendado and his friends, who are drinking on the veranda. This is interrupted by the arrival of the hacendado's sister, Sara. While the company is celebrating her arrival, one of the drunk guests seizes Maria from behind a door and drags her into a remote room. This is witnessed by one of the servants, who runs to Sebastian to inform him. Sebastian and his friends plot revenge: during the celebration with fireworks they direct skyrockets into haystacks, and when panic ensues they try to rescue Maria. This attempt is unsuccessful, and the peons flee from the fields into the nearby forest. They are followed by the hacendado, his friends, and *charros* (local cowboys), all led by Sara, who is very excited by the events and is eager to shoot. She quickly kills one of the peons, Sebastian's younger brother. She is then shot to death, and the pursuit of the peons starts anew with increased violence, until the *charros* capture the three peons with their lassos. After Sara's funeral, the three peons are executed in the most brutal manner—they are half-buried in the ground up to their chests, first left in the burning sun and then stomped to death by the *charros* on their horses. Maria is finally freed and runs to the scene of the execution, only to find her fiancé mutilated. The graphic representation of violence in this episode, especially the scene of the execution of the peons as well as the long takes of the open coffin of Sara, covered with flies, approximates the shock of the famous slaughter scene in *Strike*, or the cutting of the eye in Dali and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*.

The cruelty within the story was almost perfectly matched by the cruelty Eisenstein displayed in the making of it towards the actors. Isabel (Chabela) Villaseñor, who played Maria, was not a professional actress. The wife of the artist Gabriel Fernández Ledesma, she was herself a painter,

Figure 22. Hacienda Tetlapayac, summer of 1931. Olivier Debroise collection, Mexico City.

poet, and songwriter, whose work became well known subsequent to her appearance in the film. According to Ledesma's memoirs, Villaseñor and Ledesma (who were not yet married at that time) were introduced to Eisenstein by Roberto Montenegro at the Ministry of Education, where the director immediately offered Chabela the role, provoking a fit of jealousy in Ledesma. He thus ended up accompanying Chabela to Tetlapayac for the duration of the shoot, where they stayed in joint rooms to "protect her" from the excesses of the party atmosphere that hung over the filming, a result of the constant influx of visitors coming to meet the great director.[34] According to Chabela's own memoirs, as told to her daughter Olinka, in order to achieve the proper effect portraying the despair of Maria when she finds her fiancé buried in the ground with his skull crushed by the horses, Eisenstein made Chabela run around the walls of the hacienda, a distance of about two kilometers, in the heat, so that the exhaustion and desperation on her face was genuine. An act less of intentional cruelty than of neglect occurred during the shooting of the scene where Sebastian is trampled by the horses, when one of the horses actually did step on the head of the young actor, who had to be taken to the hospital with a skull fracture, which he barely survived.[35] Meanwhile, one of the actors who played a friend of Sebastian accidentally killed his sister with a gun that he had stolen from Tisse. Eisenstein recorded

this event in his journal in shockingly crude and unsympathetic terms, implying that the young woman was better off dead, and mostly focusing his attention on the uncanny parallel between the real events and a scene from "Maguey," which they were trying to shoot at that time. The uncanny parallel was as much between the lack of sympathy for the gunned-down woman in this journal entry and the lack of moral

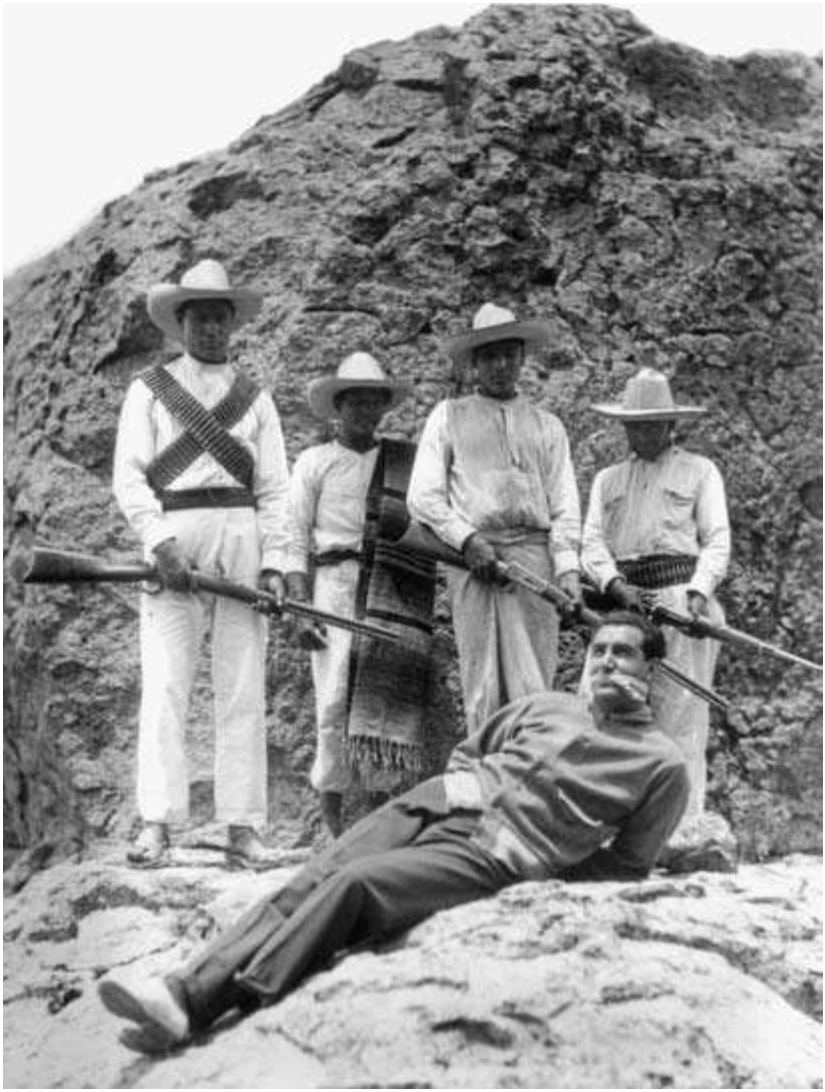

Figure 23. Julio Saldívar during the shooting of "Maguey," Tetlapayac, summer of 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Figure 24. Sergei M. Eisenstein and Arkady Boytler at hacienda Tetlapayac, summer of 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

imagination in the depiction of women in "Maguey," where, falling into a stereotypical pattern, Eisenstein simplistically pits the evil, wealthy Sara against the impoverished, innocent Maria. In a heightened atmosphere in which life crossed into art and vice versa, Ledesma's emphasis on the need to protect Chabela from the "dangers" of the lifestyle of the guests of the hacienda itself marked the crossing of the fictional and the real, echoing Sebastian's effort to protect Maria. In 1931, Mexico City was visited by a sudden influx of foreign (mostly American) artists and writers who arrived in time to populate the milieu around Eisenstein and his entourage. Many of them also traveled to Tetlapayac to see the crew in action. The Americans were often recipients of Guggenheim grants, or were supported by the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations: for instance, Frances Flynn Paine, a painter and the former wife of Joseph Freeman, the editor of *Free Masses* and a former TASS correspondent in Mexico, whom Eisenstein had known since his visits to the Soviet Union in the 1920s, came down to organize an exhibit in New York City of Diego Rivera's work. Ione Robinson, Rivera's assistant in 1930, was down on a Guggenheim. Upon her arrival in Mexico, she moved into the house that she shared with the Russian American artist Victor Arnautoff, who was also working on the murals for Rivera. Carleton Beals, another Guggenheim recipient, was Arnautoff's roommate. Zohmah Day was Robinson's classmate and another young American artist who was to marry Jean Charlot in 1939. This company, plus Katherine Anne Porter

and Adolfo Best Maugard, visited hacienda Tetlapayac as Eisenstein shot *Maguey*. Another group, including John Dos Passos and Hart Crane (who was sharing a house with Porter for a while), were living in Mexico City in 1931. It was the editor of the *New Republic*, Malcolm Cowley, who had just returned from his trip to Mexico a few months prior, who convinced Hart to go. In his memoirs Cowley recalls that he "spoke with enthusiasm about somber landscapes, Baroque churches, and its mixture of Spanish and Indian cultures." He also added that "one heard of sexual customs not unlike those of the Arabs," which apparently was enough to convince Hart to change his plans to go to Europe and come to Mexico (with a Guggenheim Fellowship) instead.[36] When in Mexico City, the group usually met for parties in the downtown area or headed to clubs and cheap cabarets. They were often joined by their Mexican bohemian counterparts, Montenegro, Best Maugard (who had spent time in Greenwich Village in the 1920s), and Salvador Novo (all notorious homosexuals). As Kimbrough reported to Sinclair, "[Eisenstein's] contacts have been with Greenwich Village artists who hang around and eat with us and go to cheap Mexican shows. Eisenstein likes them and thinks they will be of great assistance."[37] I will return to these "cheap shows" in detail in the following chapter—for now let us notice the cast of characters. Frances Toor, who was, as always, at the center of this crowd, wrote to the New York dealer Carl Zigrosser on September 2, 1931, "We had a pretty nice gang down here this summer." Along with Toor, Katherine Anne Porter was another center of gravity of the group, and another denizen of leftist circles in both Greenwich Village and Mexico City; her appeal was due in part to her familiarity with Mexico from the time she had spent there in the 1920s, and in part to her deep literary connections. She wrote about Mexico, for instance, for the *New Republic*. There was an additional link between Porter and the Eisenstein crew—Adolfo Best Maugard, an old friend of hers who greatly influenced her life and was in many ways responsible for her literary and artistic career in Mexico. Porter is a figure who deserves a deeper look.

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

Katherine Anne Porter was a self-proclaimed socialist and feminist (suffragist) with many connections to Soviet Russia from her time in New York. She was a friend of Bessie Beatty, the editor of *McCall's* and author of *Red Heart of Russia*, and Kenneth Durant, who had worked for ROSTA, later TASS. She claimed to have written many articles for ROSTA

in the period from 1919 through the 1920s. Porter was persuaded to go to Mexico in 1920 by Adolfo Best Maugard.

Upon her first arrival in Mexico in November 1920, Porter became friends with Thorberg Haberman, editor of the English language section of *El Heraldo* and a cofounder, with Elena Torres, of the Women's Party. Torres was hired by Carrillo Puerto—the same Socialist governor of Yucatán commemorated on Siqueiros's mural, which found its way into the "Prologue" of *¡Que Viva Mexico!*—to help develop schools and work full time as a feminist organizer. Porter was also friends with Xavier Guerrero, a famous artist and the secretary of the Mexican Communist Party and editor of *El Machet*e, its official newspaper. A few years later Guerrero became Tina Modotti's lover, before he left for Moscow to work for the Communist International.

Despite her proud and even somewhat standoffish demeanor, just as Tina Modotti or Alexandra Kollontai, Katherine Anne Porter was represented by many contemporaries in Mexico as a kind of Mata Hari because was allegedly on "intimate terms" with many politicians and radicals, among them Luis Napoléon Morones, the syndicate leader of Mexico's CROM. It is possible that her political connections helped her play an important role in the dissemination of Mexican art and culture in the United States. In 1922, Katherine Anne Porter greatly contributed to the famous exhibition of Mexican art in North America and was appointed its North American representative. It was Best Maugard who convinced President Obregon to give her this position. Her monograph on the exhibit is greatly influenced by the rhetoric of the movement to revive pre-Hispanic Mexican culture, and specifically by the ideas of Best Maugard. In this early monograph, Porter—who later became completely disillusioned with the ideology of the Mexican Revolution—follows along the lines of Vasconcelos's idealization of the Indian.

Porter's lifelong fascination/obsession with death makes her vision of Mexico quite comparable to that of Eisenstein, as is the repulsion mingled with fascination that she felt for sex and reproduction. In March 1926 she was the first to review D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*, which had such an impact on Eisenstein, as well as Anita Brenner's book in *Mexican Folkways* in 1929. Given Eisenstein's great interest in both works, it is very likely that he had read Porter's reviews of them.

Porter visited Tetlapayac, where Eisenstein was filming his episode "Maguey," for three days in July of 1931. She had met Eisenstein in Mexico City a few months prior. When she arrived, she found the filming suspended because of the accident. Porter's biographer Thomas F. Walsh describes the event: "On July 22, Porter wrote . . . about her three-day

visit to Tetlapayac, where Eisenstein was working, but he had a fever and 'one of the lads on the place killed his sister by accident or mistake and was in jail.' She found film assistants Alexandrov and Tisse attentive and promised to bring silk stockings and perfume to their friends in Moscow. Ernestine Evans reported to Genevieve Taggard in September that Porter 'has some sort of compact with Eisenstein' and planned to go to Russia via Paris in October, but she never went."[38]

PORTER'S "HACIENDA"

This visit to the hacienda Tetlapayac inspired Porter to write a story about the events she had witnessed. "Hacienda" appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in October 1931, and was later reworked and republished in 1934 in a separate volume. Contrary to what one might expect—and very much unlike Eisenstein's novella—the story shows much less narrative cohesion and does not follow a traditional formula. The general outline of the story is as follows.

On the train to the pulque hacienda, Kennerly (modeled on Kimbrough, who immediately earned Porter's keen dislike) complains to his companions, Andreyev and Stepanov (modeled on Alexandrov and Tisse) and the narrator herself about everything in Mexico. Andreyev, in turn, tells the narrator the story of the hacienda and its inhabitants. He also tells a story about the hacendado, Don Genaro, his lover, Lolita, and his jealous wife, Doña Julia, who became "close friends" with Lolita while Don Genaro was in Mexico City on business. At the next station the young leading actor of the film tells the story of Justino, who accidentally (or else in a jealous rage) killed his sister, fled, was captured, and is now in prison. At the hacienda, Betancourt (Best Maugard) shocks the narrator by his insincerity and duplicity. Kennerly laments that they did not film the young girl's death since the same participants enacted exactly the same event in the film, a scene that was particularly hard to shoot. The narrator tours the whole hacienda and the vat room of the pulqueria, retires for the night, and leaves the next day. "All the characters seem caught in a doomed landscape where nothing reaches a conclusion."[39]

This story can serve as both an afterword and an extension of Eisenstein's novella, which is embedded into the story itself. It deals with the same themes as Eisenstein's film, mirroring its major preoccupations, but giving them a more sober critical edge.

Death—as a narrative event and a visual and thematic motif—is in the center of Porter's story. However, she is much more explicit about

the political implication of this motif. She links the mythological with the historical and political through the image of pulquerias and haciendas, where these old traditional economic and social structures and forms of production are mirrored by mythological references to precapitalist society, but mediated through the reality of economic exploitation of the Indians.

Porter's reflections on the nature of the images of pre-Columbian Mexican mythology are very self-conscious. The narrator describes an Indian drawing "with his mouth the juice from the heart of the plant, 'maguey'"—the image familiar to us from *¡Que Viva Mexico!*—while in another instance Porter calls maguey "the cactus whose heart bleeds the honey water." Thus for Porter this image is mediated through both an Aztec ritual of sacrifice and a Christian framework, suggested by the image of a bleeding heart. At the same time, it has explicit sexual connotations, although these are quite different from Eisenstein's, whose representation of the plant and the extraction of its juice is clearly phallic. By contrast, by associating pulque with the Aztec goddess of fertility (as well as with the goddess of death), the image of maguey juice in Porter is coded as feminine: "The smell [of pulque] had not been out of nostrils since I came, but here it rose in a thick vapor through the heavy drone of flies, sour, stale, like rotting milk with blood."[40] This rotting milk conveys the idea of maternal nourishment (or its lack), but with sexual overtones. Porter observes that the legend of the goddess involves man's terror of woman's fertility.[41] Fertility is then instantly connected to death: "The almost ecstatic death-expectancy which is in the air of Mexico … strangers feel the acid of death in their bones whether or not any real danger is near them."[42] This semantic field, however, is then translated into political terms, where pulque connotes suffering because it is at the heart of the oppressive social system of the hacienda: "The white flood of pulque flowed without pause: all over Mexico the Indians would drink the corpse-white liquor, swallow forgetfulness and ease by the riverful, and the money would flow silver-white into the government treasury … It was all arranged."[43] Porter thus puts the image of death back into the realm of the historical and political; it is translated from mythological terms into historical. Ever-present death, which finds its allegorical meaning in the myth, is a feature of Porter's understanding of that particular historical moment in the early to mid-1930s: of the ruins of the revolution and the anticipation of the great European war; of the social and political decay of Mexico and, ultimately, Russia as well; of the fragility and transitory nature of human life, but also of the social order and its superstructure.

The narrator of Porter's story strongly associates herself with the character of Eisenstein—"Uspensky" in the story. Porter is more generous toward him than most other characters in the story—including Best Maugard (Betancourt)—who are represented as caricatures, with sharp irony and disdain. This is how she describes Best Maugard—a former close friend of whom she became progressively more critical:

> Mexican by birth, French-Spanish by blood, he was completely at the mercy of an ideal of elegance and detachment perpetually at war with a kind of Mexican nationalism which afflicted him like an inherited weakness of the nervous system . . . He had spent his youth unlocking the stubborn secrets of Universal Harmony by means of numerology, astronomy, astrology, a formula of thought transference and deep breathing, the practice of will-to-power combined with the latest American theories of personality development; certain complicated magical ceremonies; and a careful choice of doctrines from the several schools of Oriental philosophies which are, from time to time, so successfully introduced into California. From this material he had constructed a Way of Life which could be taught to anyone.[44]

Porter's obvious sympathy toward Eisenstein is particularly striking given the fact that this description of Betancourt (which she lifted word for word from her art notes on Best Maugard[45]) could also arguably be applied to Eisenstein with sufficient corrections, and the fact that Porter gave him the name "Uspensky," a reference to the Russian mystic Ouspensky whose ideas influenced Best Maugard, suggesting her awareness of Eisenstein's interest in religious ideas and a certain affinity with Best Maugard's theoretical apparatus.

Porter also maintained an ambiguous and often critical attitude toward homosexuality in Mexico, which she wasn't averse to expressing. In her letters she frequently complained of decadent homosexual artists and politicians.[46] As Mark Busby wrote in "Katherine Anne Porter and Texas: Ambivalence Deep as the Bone": "she deplored homosexuals and consistently sought relationships with homosexual or bisexual men."[47] In the story, however, gender criticisms are only reserved for the "oppressors." While she suggests a homosexual relationship between the effeminate Betancourt and his "very sleek and slim-wasted assistant"[48] (Agustín Aragón Leiva, one of Eisenstein's most ardent followers in Mexico, who later played an important role in prolonged attempts to return the footage of the film to the Soviet director), the love affair between the women mainly serves to confound the sexist hacendados—quite a departure from Eisenstein's formulaic representation of feminity in "Maguey."

Figure 25. Sergei M. Eisenstein and Adolfo Best Maugard at hacienda Tetlapayac, summer of 1931 (Isabel Villaseñor sitting next to the fountain). Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

IMAGES OF FEMININITY IN "MAGUEY"

Unlike "Sandunga," in which women occupied a privileged place, in the narrative and representational logic of "Maguey," the position of a woman is restored back to its traditional place as a passive object and a vehicle of the narrative (the rape of Maria is what propels the development of the story). Maria is not only a passive and naive victim of her circumstances, but her passive femininity, constantly underlined by the close-ups of her with a donkey and other baby animals, is marked as positive in contrast to the aggressive, militaristic, and Europeanized Sara, reminiscent of the grotesque women's battalion in *October*. While the rape of Maria is what propels the rebellion of the peons, the execution of Sebastian and his friends occurs as a result of Sara being shot. The execution of Sebastian

is the real climax of the episode, and it contains some of the most memorable and commented-on images from the film. Despite the overt meaning of the episode regarding the dehumanization of life on the hacienda during the Porfiriato, where a woman is reduced to an object and a peon's life is worthless, visually it almost appears to be a mere pretext for a sadistic display of male seminudity. In a story that deals with the treatment of people as objects under the capitalist system of haciendas, one can argue that men are aesthetically reduced to mere fetishes—and are, therefore, also objects. Not only are the women mere stand-ins for abstract qualities, allegorical representations of virtues or vices, but the men are as well, serving primarily as allusions to baroque paintings of saints and martyrs (in particular of St. Sebastian and of the suffering of Christ on the cross) and Aztec sacrificial rituals. In contrast to "Sandunga," in which pre-Columbian culture is represented through the filter of the Christian paradise myth, and unlike "Fiesta," which makes the connections between the Spanish and the pre-Columbian rituals apparent, in "Maguey" the Christian baroque allusions are more obvious while the pre-Columbian ones are comparatively hidden. However, as everywhere else in the film, the different epochs, civilizations, and stages of development coexist, interwoven through the themes of death and sacrifice and the visual motifs.

Using "Maguey" as the title for the episode functions in a similar way as it does in Porter's story. It alludes both to the raw material for the economic production on which the hacienda was founded (the making of pulque), and to the ancient myths surrounding this cactus plant. In the hacienda where the episode was filmed, one of the rooms is decorated with a fresco of the pulque (maguey) goddess. The fresco is a copy of one of the most famous nineteenth-century Mexican paintings, the first painting done in the academic style that incorporated Aztec visual motifs, the presentation of maguey to Cortez by an Indian woman, thus providing a visual demonstration of the fusion of colonial elements with the pre-Columbian ones in Mexican culture as far back as the eighteenth century. At the same time, by the early twentieth century in Mexico pulque, the alcoholic beverage produced from maguey, became synonymous with rural poverty and feudal (precapitalist) oppression. When the beer industry started to pick up in Mexico, pulque, an agrarian product impossible to produce on a mass scale, was not economically viable anymore, and the physical labor necessary to its production was, in fact, a form of preindustrial economic oppression. The middle classes preferred a more "elegant" (i.e., urban) beverage—beer—while pulque was seen as a drink of the rural poor. This is noticeable in the episode, when the hacendado and his friends drink beer instead of the pulque on which their wealth rests.[49]

Figure 26. Image from "Maguey." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

But aside from these contemporary associations, maguey in Mexico has a rich cultural history. The symbolism of maguey goes back to the Aztec myths. In the ritual celebrations of sacrifice of a woman as a corn goddess, she wears a mantle of maguey meant to represent her son—the god of corn.[50] Eisenstein must have read the description of this rite in Frazer even before his trip to Mexico, but he was undoubtedly reminded of this fact in Tetlapayac. The death of Sebastian mediated through Aztec mythology clearly hints at sacrifice as a fertility rite, especially emphasized by the fact that the victims are half-buried in the ground. While such sacrifices as fertility rites were practiced by many ancient civilizations, the practice of an execution such as the one depicted in "Maguey" is something that Eisenstein apparently invented. There is no mention of any such punishment or torture practiced in Mexico either at the time depicted in the episode or at any point in the past. The choice of this image is curious. It makes an effective link between death and rebirth (as being "planted" in the ground would suggest). At the same time, as we have already noted, the image is clearly modeled on St. Sebastian, as is evident from the name, and thus functions as a reference to baroque iconography.

Marie Seton in her biography of Eisenstein and further supported by observations from Leyda claims that shots of Sebastian's death in

"Maguey" were to be intercut with scenes of the ecstasy of a peon in a Corpus Christi festival which took place in Tetlapayac, thus linking Sebastian's death with an ecstatic religious experience, and further underlining the allusion to St. Sebastian. The continuity here is also visual on the level of the body—just as the features of the faces of the Mayas in the "Prologue" are consistent with the faces of the stone gods (their ancestors), the peon who is going through the Christian drama resembles Sebastian visually.

The composition of the shots is triangular, especially the famous shot of the three peons buried in the ground. This was intended to visually correspond to the images of the pyramids from the "Prologue," making another visual link to the idea of *Idols Behind Altars*, as well as to Best Maugard's theory of geometrical shapes (a triangle being one of the central figures among them) as fundamental to all Mexican art. Marie Seton describes this idea in her draft of the chapter on *¡Que Viva Mexico!*

> An attempt to deal with the whole and the detail, so in Mexico this infinite variety is synthesized into a whole, a certain very decided pattern is discovered.
>
> The fundamental pattern of Mexico is the pyramidical form . . . for it is the skeleton structure of the greater part of the landscape . . . thus the land and the most characteristic plants form the design which was symbolical to the ancients of the speculative idea of God, Man, and the Universe.
>
> People embody the shape of the pyramids with the serape hanging from their shoulders.
>
> E felt that the entire history of successive civilizations is revealed there.
>
> In eliminating picturesque generalities, the particular assumes a monumental simplicity; and though the unedited pattern of VM appears intricate, and at first the sequences taken at many different places seem to be outwardly unrelated, they are in fact strung together by their inner meaning and the formal nature of their composition.
>
> In composition as well as in ideas, the five parts, or five cycles, form a historical spiral so that ideas seen in the first part are also seen in the last part which has, so to speak, en route drawn together many threads from the intervening cycles.
>
> E mentioned how he had used the triangular form in composing the scene in VM where the peons are trampled to death by the friends of the hacendado.

He conceived the whole film as a complete visual unity with certain primary forms. Predominantly the triangle and the inverted triangle were to lend accents to the internal and the emotional relationship of ideas recurring over and over again in the film.[51]

The composition of the shots was of particular importance to Eisenstein; his letter to Seymour Stern sent from New York on his departure from America confirms that:

Viva Mexico in the theoretical research field is before everything "a shot" (camera angle) picture: I think I have solved (anyhow for myself) the montage problem (as a system of expression). This picture has to analyze the same laws on their other degree—the "shot." It is a pretty hard problem—but a couple of emotional "thru breaks" by their extravagance I suppose will help (and partly have already helped) to solve the angle problem as well. I am always very careful in "my angles"—but in this picture especially—I am unrestful until I get into the nerve—basic nerve of a thing—and in this problem there are still little odds and ends which escape and will not be clear to the moment of the release of the picture.

There are some "refrain" treatments through the whole picture made in the same manner and connected with the death theme going through it. It is an overtonal theme to the picture—besides the "rough" social theme of enslavement of the peons.[52]

What this explanation makes clear is that Eisenstein's notion of montage (which would eventually find its full manifestation in his theory of vertical montage), which makes the formal elements of editing inseparable from the ideological content, has shifted from the importance of editing to the formal composition of the shot, but retains its function as simultaneously stylistic and semantic.

This confirms the twofold treatment of both the theme and the visual motif of death—"the overtonal theme of the picture"—through religion as well as through politics. Similarly, linking an execution of a rebel by the hacendado with an imitation of the suffering of Christ serves as another instantiation of Eisenstein's representation of death as being simultaneously coded as a religious mystery and as a political event.

SACRIFICE

The image of sacrifice saturates all the parts of the two novellas. The bull is ultimately sacrificed in honor of the Virgin Guadalupe (as the matadors make clear by praying to the Virgin before the fight), Christ's

suffering on the cross is imitated by the believers as a way to salvation and, hence, eternal life. Aztec sacrifices are prominently featured and are one of the parallels between colonial culture and pre-Columbian rituals. Finally, the execution of the peons in "Maguey" visually replicates the representations of St. Sebastian as well as the crucifixion, yet also refer to primitive sacrificial rites.

Death and suffering are metonymically linked through the image of a puncture of the body, which serves as a visual leitmotif. Baronita, the picador, plays another important function in this respect: he inflicts wounds on the bull by puncturing it, providing a link with the suffering of the Christ imitators, who carry a cactus like a cross on their shoulders, with sharp thorns piercing their bodies, and also with the punctures of the maguey plants during the process of extracting juice in order to produce pulque. Finally, there are the punctures of the bullets as they penetrate both the maguey plants and the peon's bodies during the uprising. Eisenstein elaborates on these instances of physical cruelty:

> Mexico is lyrical and tender, but also brutal. It knows the merciless lashes of the whips, lacerating the golden surface of bare skin. The sharp cactus spikes to which, at the height of the civil wars, they tied those already shot to death, to die in the heart of the desert sands. The sharp spikes that still penetrate the bodies of those who, having made crosses from the cacti's vertical trunks, tie them with rope to their own shoulders and crawl for hours up to the top of the pyramids, to glorify the Catholic Madonnas—de Guadalupe, de los Remedios, the Santa Maria Tonantzintla; Catholic Madonnas since Cortes's time triumphantly occupying the places and positions of the cult of the former pagan gods and goddesses. In order not to change the age-old routes of pilgrimages, the crafty monks raised statues and temples on the very same spots (heights, deserts, pyramids) where the overthrown ancient, heathen gods of the Aztecs, Toltecs, or Mayas had once reigned. . . . Physical brutality, whether in the "ascetism" of monk's self-flagellation or in the torturing of others, in the blood of the bull or the blood of man, pouring over the sands of countless Sunday corridas after Mass, in a sensual sacrament; the history of unparalleled brutality in crushing the countless uprisings of the peons, who had been driven to a frenzy by the exploitation of the landowners.[53]

The visual motifs of punctures and wounds and penetrations of the flesh carried over metonymically to the maguey cactus clearly create sexual undertones. We begin with the juice of the plant, a milky substance. But its breastlike connotations are combined and negated by the phallic

Figure 27. Image from "Maguey." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

erectness of the plant, which is visually striking. And, to complete the ensemble of images, there are the images of the various wounds hacked into the plants, which in a sense complete the cycle that moves from the breast to the phallus to the site of castration.

One constant in Eisenstein's drawings and in many shots in "Maguey" is the intimation of fellatio, both by men and women, which has a dual signification: fellatio as a partial sexual operation stopping short of further intercourse and fellatio as a castration. The fetishization of the male body and its various attributes (most obviously the ornate clothing) that is consistent throughout the two episodes finds its place within a psychoanalytical interpretation of this structure.[54] Moreover, by the 1930s, St. Sebastian, who is visually referenced throughout this part of the film, had long been associated with homoeroticism.[55]

The sexual undertones of all the images saturating the two episodes were clearly intentional, as Eisenstein's drawings from that period demonstrate very clearly.[56] The most concise explanation of this is in Eisenstein's 1932 notes for an article about his Mexican drawings to be written by Anita Brenner for the journal *Creative Art*. In this draft, in which he talks about himself in the third person, he links this "dialectical experience," which can take place in its earliest manifestation through forms of religious and (bi)sexual transgression and ecstasy, to social and political transformation:

> The experience of the dialectical phenomenon instead of its understanding—this is what E. characterizes as the state of ex-statis and its *urge* toward the main mystery of being, which can become accessible through ex-stasis (Vedas, the Catholics—all ecstasies lead to the same thing and all are identical in terms of their goals and methods—having merely local variations).
>
> Dialectical epiphany remains on the stage of subjective experience up until the point of sufficient social differentiation, which would allow for the visible development of the phenomenon on the social organism (which corresponds to the sharp separation of the proletariat as a class).[57]

In other words, when social development has not reached the necessary stage coinciding with the rise of the working class, the only forms of dialectical experiences available are subjective ones, primarily by means of religious or sexual ecstasy. Only when society reaches the necessary stage of development can a collective form of this dialectical experience—through art and, more specifically, through film—be possible. And yet, in a dialectical reversal, this progress can only be achieved by means of regression—both individual and collective—to the earliest forms. It is only when this regression is complete that the synthesis and the dialectical shift can take place. While "Fiesta" and "Maguey" attempt to bring this experience to an audience by means of a return to Aztec rituals, the violence of the bullfight, and the homoerotic transgressions of the baroque, Eisenstein's Mexican drawings serve as a record of his own experience of this regression.

> E. appears as an erotic monk and a mystic from the Middle Ages . . . as a cynic and ecstatic. A singer of orgasms of all known and unknown varieties, Ecstatic in the way of blasphemy of the religious aspect of the same intensity as a pathetic of the social ideal—in its objective production.
>
> This atavistic area of production is thoroughly marked by religiosity in its most "topsy-turvy" aspect, by *dechainement erotique* with an obvious touch of the motif of bisexualty from its crudest interpretation to the most exquisite formal and stylistic elements.
>
> Combining in the baroque double crucifixions made of matadors and bulls merging through their bloody death-marriages into the criminal deadly feast of love on the Golgotha . . .
>
> Cohabitation of Saint Theresa with the shadow of the cross. Or the cross itself as the source of hot and cold water in the shower of the Catholic club.[58]

While accompanying the crew on their trip to Tehuantepec, Jean Charlot, one of the muralists who, with Rivera, worked on the frescoes at SEP and became one of Eisenstein's friends in Mexico, commented that: "[Eisenstein] was especially studying then mysticism and the works of Saint Theresa of Avila. The result was a series of drawings on the stigmatas. Being myself a Catholic, I was curious of this angle in his thoughts. I think he felt that he was missing something important but could not fit it into an orthodox Marxist pattern."[59] Charlot, a devout Catholic but also a friend of Rivera and Siqueiros, sensed the necessity for Eisenstein to link mysticism to the questions posed by orthodox Marxism—although it is not entirely clear whether by "orthodox" Charlot here, in the 1950s, means Marxism-Leninism as theorized in the Soviet Union of Eisenstein's time, or whether he refers to Marx and Engels in more general terms. Charlot did understand that what was at stake for Eisenstein was a formulation of a unique version of materialist dialectics, unlike anything theorized by Soviet Marxists. For his vision of dialectical history Eisenstein chose the stylistic form most closely resembling the baroque. The transvestism of the bullfight, the mimicry of art and nature implicit in the mariposa steps, the femininity of the peons as they are being executed and that of the Christ imitators all point for Eisenstein towards the transformation of matter into spirit in the suffering and ecstasy of death. Eisenstein admired plasticity and the endless ability for transformation that he saw in Walt Disney's drawings when he first saw them in 1929–30 in Europe and the U.S.: "Disney pictures in terms of their material are purely ecstatic—[they carry] all the features of ex-stasis (one's implantation into nature and animals)."[60]

These are all forms of what Eisenstein terms "ex-statis," "coming-out-of-one's-self," and as we have noted earlier, they are instantiations of this drive to transform, which can be seen as a manifestation of the revolutionary transformation of society. This drive is ultimately utopian, establishing an analogy between the breakthrough to the eternal life by means of a reversal in the baroque allegory, and regression as a means to revolutionary transformation.[61] The teleology of the resurrection in the baroque is an example of such ultimate transformation. In *¡Que Viva Mexico!* this resurrection takes place in the "Epilogue," which may allow one to read the whole film as a baroque drama.

THE WILL TO TRANSFORM AND THE "PROTOPLASM"

As we have already observed, this "drive to transform and to be transformed," to "become" is of central importance to Eisenstein's thought of that time. It is further developed into a theory of protoplasm as a

nondifferentiated primary matter, characterized by its infinite plasticity and ability to transform. The term "protoplasm" becomes central in Eisenstein's writing in 1932, the year of his return from Mexico:

> In addition to this year's discoveries: the protoplasm. [It's a] social moment in biology: the emergence of the social from two . . . cells: that's already a conflict of interests! . . .
>
> We have everything. It's time to create the system as a whole. And we must.
>
> By all means.
>
> Mexico?!!!
>
> I challenge myself!
>
> The challenge is accepted.[62]

In these notes Eisenstein not only dates his "discovery" of protoplasm as an operative category in his method, but also explicitly links it to Mexico, and through Gogol to the themes of religious ecstasy and homosexuality: "Gogol is methodologically the best example of the shifting of art toward ex-stasis (religiosity, homosexuality, and Grotesk komisches)."[63]

Anne Nesbet claimed that the concept of "bi-sex" first appears in Eisenstein's notes from 1932–34 in reference to clowns in the circus and ritual transvestism.[64] However, we should move up Nesbet's dating, since we already find this term in the notes to Brenner's article written in 1931 and used in direct relation to *¡Que Viva Mexico!* Eisenstein interest in ritual transvestism could be gratified by observation among indigenous peoples in Mexico. Ritual transvestism was not uncommon in most cultures of ancient Mexico. Among *huicholes* (one of the indigenous groups in Mexico), at the inauguration of a new temple in honor of the sun and fire deities, men dressed as women danced around columns adorned with long ribbons, imitating intercourse. The ceremony concluded with the preparation of corn tamales as offerings to the gods, thus connecting ritual androgyny to the symbolism of fertility. Oaxaca, the state where Eisenstein filmed the "Sandunga" episode, is known not only for its remnants of matriarchy, which survive to this day in the smaller villages around Tehuantepec, but also for the symbolic role still played by transvestites in some traditional communities, especially in Tehuantepec. This is also the case in parts of the state of Guerrero, where Eisenstein also shot some of the footage. While homosexuality was punishable by death in most ancient cultures of Mexico, in some cultures *berdaches* ("a biological male who dressed, gestured and spoke as an effeminate" and who "served macho males by assuming the female division of labor")[65] occupied a different status: they were seen as almost deitylike, mirroring

the image of the bisexual gods, and their families and community had to support them as their presence was considered a sign of divine blessing. They also took part in ritual dances and celebrations, where they occupied a prominent place. Many such rituals are still in existence among the more traditional communities in Mexico, where some have syncretically absorbed Mexican history, as for instance in the case of one of the folkloric dances among the *totonacas* in the region of Sierra, which incorporates traditional ritualistic elements of pre-Colonial Mexico with performances involving men dressed as women, impersonating the role of "*Las Malinches*."[66]

Eisenstein assigned transvestism and bisexuality to archaic prelogical times, which were retained in the modern world: "The exchange of clothing . . . is the exchange of essences—the crudest form of the materialization of these essences is the different sexual organs. Such that the exchange of clothing is the exchange of organs . . . the exchange of essences."[67]

In his later essay, "Shift to the Biological Level" (1944), Eisenstein quotes Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which he was reading in Mexico, as one of the sources of this information. After a long list of examples of such exchanges, Eisenstein gives his interpretation of it: "I think that this ritual belongs to the many beliefs that have to do with the study of the unified originary androgynous being, which was then divided into two types of essences—Male and Female, which then through marriage form a new restoration of this originary unified bisexual being. Through the situational reproduction of this originary nature, each becomes part of the superhuman being when at the moment of the ritual it becomes identical to the originary idol, which in all cultures shares both male and female essences."[68] Transvestism as well as bisexuality, then, are understood by Eisenstein as forms of a return to the originary primary state. While in this passage he designates this state as bisexual, the ultimate manifestation of it, both on the level of evolutionary biological matter and of the individual consciousness, is not merely bisexual but rather sexually nondifferentiated, that is, presexual. The androgyny of the gods to which Eisenstein refers in this passage is a utopian image, foreshadowing the human possibility of breaking through to a radically new social state, characterized by sublimating the differentiation in class or gender in a new kind of human being—a superhuman being. "These ideas about bisexuality here bear no relation to any narrow sexual problem. We are interested in the issue of the 'lifting' of this biological field of application of the conceptual opposites through the image of an imaginary superhuman who unites the oppositions. Always and everywhere the possession of these

Figure 28. Eisenstein as a Mexican bishop (photomontage), autumn of 1931. Ivor Montagu Papers, The British Film Institute, London.

qualities of the originary idol is linked to the ability to reach the superhuman state."[69] Here for Eisenstein the prehistoric ideal gives hope for a utopian future; dialectically the originary prehuman state of being manifests itself as superhuman, and both are pre- or postgender. For him, essences are indeed interchangeable and point to some original inseparability of

the two genders. Thus identity, both gender and sexual, is just a matter of disguise, of clothing—and all of this is changing and interchangeable and acts as a manifestation of the same, of what Eisenstein in 1933 calls "plasmatic characteristics of primordial matter."[70] He links matter directly to libido, commenting on the theme of regression in Hegel: "could also refer to Freud: the libido theory . . . is the reproduction of the protoplasmic stage."[71] Libido, then, is the direct reflection of the essence in which life and death, male and female are inseparable. This protoplasmic stage is then coded in terms of the human biological and psychological evolution and is thus linked to infantilism: "Because Protoplasm is infantilism. [It's a] project of the protoplasmatic state into consciousness. Or if you prefer—its cyclical return along the stages of development. This, of course, is the flow of subconscious—this is infantilism—and there you have my case."[72] Eisenstein here is constantly using the metaphors of biological time in reference to history. He himself linked the perceived androgyny of Mexican men and the playfulness of Mexican women to the youth of their culture, by which he meant the pre-Hispanic indigenous Mexico (which he, in line with the ideology of the day, equated with Mexico in general), using the metaphors of biological time in relation to history. These younger (i.e., ancient) cultures are closer to the prelogical, sensual thinking, which is acquired by civilizations as well as by people with age.

In his notes Eisenstein assigns the same quality to all of Mexico (and specifically to the *Indio*), writing that Mexico is young and infantile, that its men and women are more androgynous because they are closer to the prenatal undifferentiated state of nature, and thus more protoplasmatic.[73] At the same time, he applied this same progression (or regression) to the biological evolution of humans, as well as to the development of the individual consciousness. According to Eisenstein, bisexuality is a remnant of this predifferentiated state—its traces can be found in premodern cultural rituals, in prenatal development, and in the individual consciousness. Once again, a return to this predifferentiated state mediated through its dialectical opposite—analytical, logical, progressive thought—is what allows for a radical breakthrough: first on the level of the experience of an individual consciousness and artistic creation, and then onto the collective and social sphere.

"BI-SEX"

In the notes regarding the article he sent to Brenner, Eisenstein designates bisexuality (or a "bisexual conflict" or "bi-sex," as he terms it) as the best object of observation and the main form of the realization of

the dialectical experience on the subjective level, before the possibility of this experience becoming social and collective: "Bisexual conflict, *le plus saillant* in a subject, becomes the main factor for observation and the main mechanism for the realization of a [dialectical] phenomenon."[74] These notes resonate with Brenner's own impressions of Eisenstein, clearly based on their conversations. She writes in a letter to her husband (who was studying medicine):

> Nov. 28, 1931
> I'm enclosing, along with the Tina material, a drawing of Eisenstein's which I thought might amuse you. I see him every now and then and like him a lot. He's one swell guy. When he goes to New York he wants to see things medical. He'd like to make a film of pre-natal life; all about how one twin strangles another. Meanwhile he is making grand Mexican films and a lot of converts; even Misrachi is getting a little red through the sheer charm of the man.[75]

And, presumably, answering his question, she continues in the next letter:

> Eisenstein? He's a short rosy cheerful soul, in fact almost hilarious. The chambermaids and waitresses and such always start grinning as soon as they get within three feet of him, and one feels full of ribald laughter in his mere neighborhood. He's sort of Gargantuan in his attitude and appetites except that he doesn't drink or smoke. Towards women I think he is lusty, though there is a faint haze of suggestion around that he also is himself a "jotografo," that's his own word for the rest. He has extraordinary personal charm and is a vivid and very entertaining conversationalist. He acts things out, always with a gaily satiric outline, and is chiefly interested in religion and sex, both of which acquire the same character in his interpretation. His drawings are the work of a man with no inhibitions whatsoever instead of with many, as an amateur psychologist might suppose. He expresses himself so completely that the lewdness of it is almost classic, and is very like what a Greek might have done; a Greek whose sexual habits were almost normal, except in degree. My guess would be that he's double-sexed, as certainly he has an appreciation of the desirability of both males and females. He was arrested in Paris and accused, chiefly, of attracting by his extraordinary personal charm, many friends to the Soviet Republic. He tells this and other tales with effective contagious amusement. I'm sure you'd like him a lot. I do.[76]

What we know of Eisenstein's own personal sexual experiences in Mexico, which infuses the observations in his notes to Brenner, comes from his letter to his future wife, Pera Atasheva.[77] In the letter he

announces that he is in love, and that he was finally able to "go all the way" sexually. The object of Eisenstein's love was, indeed, a man, a native of Guadalajara, Jorge Palomino y Cañedo. They probably met sometime in September 1931 through Best Maugard or Montenegro. It seems that Palomino joined Eisenstein for the trip to Jalisco and Colima in October, where some of the luscious imagery from "Sandunga" was shot. At the time of this trip, Alexandrov was sick, so he did not join the party, nor, for some reason, did Kimbrough. Thus, of Eisenstein's entourage only Tisse joined Eisenstein, and possibly Palomino for the trip to Colima, where quite a long time was spent on the beach. Very likely, the sequences in "Sandunga" of the nude girls with flowers in their hair, and the boys in hammocks, as well a quite a few of the landscapes and the wild animals, were shot on the Colima coast, to be incorporated in the "Sandunga" episode.[78]

The details of Eisenstein's actual erotic encounter count less for our purposes here than the encounter's effects on the way that Eisenstein theorized his experiences, both in the notes to Brenner and later: Eisenstein's subjective erotic experience is described by him as happening on the first level of a "dialectical perception" ("*dialekticjeskoi percepcii*"). Eros is the connecting point between subjective perception and dialectical materialism. In spite of its considerable length, it is worth citing the letter to Atasheva in full, both for the light it sheds on Eisenstein's own life and, more importantly, as a brilliant example of how Eisenstein theorized his experiences within the same framework that he applies to his art and theoretical ideas in his notes to Anita Brenner. Eisenstein's understanding of the connection between the philosophical concepts of "will" and "experience," as explained in the notes to Brenner, provide a key for comprehending this otherwise cryptic letter, and subsequently the whole cluster of sexual and homoerotic allusions in Eisenstein's work and writing.

Eisenstein analyzes his neurotic inability to consummate sexual acts in terms of the dialectic between prelogical thinking, in this case associated with what he terms the "expressive movement," and the logic of the libidinal body: "Arms and legs (*and something else!*) don't lie and are not dependent on logic and its erroneous conclusions!" Here Eisenstein extends the logic of sensuous thinking to the idea of the embodiment of the ever-present memory of the primitive consciousness, of the body itself as the main conduit of know-how, mediated through the analysis of "rational" mind. While he analyzes his own sexual neurosis as "sickness of the will" ("*bolezn' voli*"), this concept of the will itself acts as a link between the subjective erotic-ecstatic experience, and dialectical

Figure 29. Photo caption reads "Grigori Alexandrov on a beach in Mexico." Olivier Debroise collection, Mexico City.

Figure 30. Sergei M. Eisenstein, unknown boy, and Roberto Montenegro, Colima, November 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

phenomena in general: "The problem of expressive movement, as you remember, includes will as constituting the conflict. We should become clearer on this [issue] (pathologically in so many ways—what great field for vivisection—auto-vivisection!)"[79]

So once again Eisenstein comes full circle, from his sexual experience to universal will, and back to his "auto-vivisections." He then uses the same set of metaphors—not merely organic, as most Eisenstein scholars notice, but pathological, linguistically erasing the distinction between life and death, an important motif in the Mexican film. In his analysis of the "organic machinery" in Disney and Eisenstein, Mikhail Iampolskii remarks that Eisenstein seems to be unaware of the violence in the plasticity of Disney's characters, celebrated by Eisenstein and linked to the primordial protoplasmic state.[80] I would argue, however, that this violence and the brutality of the body as it is subjected to infinite mutations, mutilations, and dissections—the graphic sadism of Disney's elasticity and Eisenstein's protoplasm—are integral to Eisenstein. Far from being blind, he is as acutely aware and as aesthetically invested in it as Bataille. Iampolskii links this plasticity directly to the process of commodification. He implies that Eisenstein's lack of awareness of both the commodification (turning living phenomena into objects defined by their exchange value, i.e., commodities) and mortification implied in these synthetic experiments of unifying animals and people, machines and organic matter, signals his lack of awareness of the ideological implications of commodification in art and its dangers and misrecognition and subsequent misinterpretation of it as organic and natural phenomena.

While operating within the metaphors of anatomical pathology, erasing the difference between living and dead organisms in some utopian synthesis (in the following quote, the "pulse of the dissected process"), in the same passages Eisenstein also insists on the synthesis of materialism and idealism. As he explains it in the notes to Brenner: "Medically—through the anatomical scalpel of materialism directed at what seems to be the most esoteric spheres of human experience and 'spirit.' . . . One supposed that this would give him some additional baggage of possibilities of understanding and epiphanies because the unity, which inevitably links the two essences, gives rise to the possibility for a certain orientation at the dark and inarticulate period of creative beginnings and a certain intuitive connection in the moments of the abstract analytical dismemberment, which keeps a connection to the pulse of the dissected process."[81]

This attempt to bring together idealism and materialism is the utopian instance that allows Eisenstein to conduct an indirect polemic with the positivists; a polemic that informed Eisenstein's schema of parallels

between the development of different societies and human organisms.[82] Conceding the positivist model of evolution, which defines the primitive with relation to a telos, notably the technological scientific culture of the West, he nevertheless rejects the idea that the primitive is equivalent to the negative, even seeing virtual utopian moments in what is regressive. This virtuality comes into focus only when seen from the perspective of a revolution, however. And it is that revolutionary leap that no positivist notion of progress can comprehend. Here the issue of the free will of the agent of history comes into play. In his theory, Eisenstein includes the unconscious and the individual will, mediating between the individual and the collective conditions in which that will is situated and theoretically capable, in the revolutionary act, of overturning those conditions. The baroque, which positivism can only look upon with horror, and which historically, in its modernist guise, can be seen as a reaction against the emerging modern rationalist thinking, becomes the figure of that which stands in opposition to rational thought—the subconscious. Eisenstein theorizes that the libidinally invested and prelogical subconscious is a throwback to the primary state of things (the protoplasm), the fluid and the dynamic flow, defying the logic and the economy of the evolutionary model. Much as Freud's ontogeny of the subject references the physiological conditions of infant development, Eisenstein's ontogeny of the revolutionary 'superman' references the mythical conditions of history, as revealed by archaeology and ethnography.

As elsewhere in his writing, in his letter to Pera Atasheva Eisenstein finds an equivalence between this personal (psychological and physiological) dynamic and the same dialectic as it manifests itself in art and ultimately results in social transformation. Commenting on the synthesis of analysis and experience that resulted in his ability to consummate the sexual act, Eisenstein rather enigmatically brings Mexican plastic arts into the equation: "For the first time, I am experiencing and not evaluating . . . Here it seems as if things came together for the first time. Besides we have here the case of aesthetic unload (discharge)—which is of course thoroughly sexual. And my adoration of the Mexican stone plastic arts is merely a static sexualism of a dynamic plasticity turned immobile."[83]

The Mexican plastic arts are presented here as another manifestation of the same "dynamic plasticity," sexuality (and, implicitly, bisexuality, as the highest manifestation of this primal plasticity), which just a few months later he would first term the "protoplasm," turned immobile. On the level of artistic creation, film technology is what brings motion back to these works—through the film that Eisenstein was in the process of making. "The Mexican picture in its conception is perhaps the

fullest and most flexible realization, in order to thoroughly embody this internal cluster fertilized by the highest stage of the ecstatic-dialectical insight—from irony to crude buff, to the wit of a formula or an example of the most abstract statement."[84] Since this "highest degree of ecstatic-

Figure 31. Sergei Eisenstein during the scouting for "Soldadera," Tehuacán, Puebla, December 1931. Ivor Montagu Papers, The British Film Institute, London.

dialectical insight," as he states in this same article, is fully realizable on the social level only through proletarian revolution, the ecstatic experience on the social level is the experience of the revolution that mediates the prelogical primitive structures simultaneously present in society. In the "Epilogue" to *¡Que Viva Mexico!* Eisenstein turns to the Mexican Revolution and the promise it holds.

Appendix: Translation of the Letter from Sergei Eisenstein to Pera Atasbeva

[The letter arrived in Moscow on December 22, 1931.]
Hotel Imperial
25.XI.31

Dearest Pearl!
Although in my previous letter I berated you for your earlier letters, as you can see, I still believe so stubbornly in your improvement that I continue writing. As you remember, I promised to write during those rare short moments when I feel "good." Right now it's internal, although I am very tired, if you can imagine that, of . . . being happy: starting in the evening two days ago, all day yesterday and today in the morning. It's a very funny feeling. Its absence from my life is, of course, to no small degree responsible for my *morbidness* as a permanent state. *I have happened to be happy* in the evening two days ago. I think that the psychological results of this should be huge. The thing is that all the "adventures" of which I had written to you were pure "Don Juanism" (You are so well-read that you know that the phenomenon of Don Juanism is a result of "insecurity" requiring constant "proofs" of one's powers—from this point of view most of my adventures were exactly that: the objects as such were hardly important (and besides how could this "importance" be developed in these objects when I only knew them for 15 minutes to 2 hours before intercourse. There was no time to fall in love). *On the other hand*, you know that I never went all the way with these love objects. I always broke things off halfway, justifying myself by pity or humanism or external circumstances. I have often complained to you about my tendency to obstruct in all aspects. Too much impediment. It affects even the smallest things: it's enough for me to fancy something (some unimportant nonsense) to make sure I do everything NOT to get it. For a long time now I see

it as transference from the sexual sphere, where my superascetism is so good at producing repression and its immediate automatic enforcement (whenever desire appears) that it covers all my activity! In the large scale phenomena (all my tour de force of recent years—of truly great decisiveness, initiative, and stamina—judging objectively)—is a kind of "coward's bravery" (not in terms of courage but rather in terms of an activeness which would not be slowed down by the lack of decisiveness). It is also perhaps a kind of overcompensation for "loss of" (of personal willpower) in terms of sentimental decisiveness to "go all the way." I was madly in love for ten days, and then got everything I wanted. I really regret that I cannot tell you all about it (maybe I will write about it—but indirectly somehow—*it is too funny and in forms, cast, etc.—too incredible and amusing!*) in detail. You'll get the photo anyhow (only with the name and XXX—you'll know what it means)—also later, it's not done yet. But the main thing is not in the details or facts (maybe objectively not of such colossal results as the corresponding psychological factors). But this factor itself is remarkable: it seems I have crushed the complex that had been weighing down on me for ten years (or more!). You know how I throw myself into work with all decisiveness when I make interpretations in my films (sometimes resulting in failure)? For the first time I did the same on the sentimental front. Logical analysis may not be completely satisfied with the results, but for the first time I am experiencing and not evaluating (I feel like a butterfly—*do you see me from there?*). You cannot even imagine what it means to suddenly take it to a 100% after 10 years of taking a certain fact to 99% and stopping there out of indecisiveness. I never suspected this. I think that psychologically it is going to have huge consequences. An explosion of a complex is an amazing thing. (The psychoanalytical case is typical, of course: for ten years I have had the division of objects into physiological and sentimental levels: I sleep with the former, but don't "love," the latter I "adore" but don't have coitus with. Here everything came together, seems like for the first time; besides we have here the case of aesthetic discharge—which is of course thoroughly sexual. And my adoration of the Mexican stone plastic arts is merely a static sexualism of a dynamic plasticity turned immobile. This is also the case of "combined type" covering a whole series of "situations of rejection" with a single realized one (especially intensified in the past 11 months).

I just reread what I have written. I doubt this is comprehensible. Consider it a delirium of joy. (In the very fact of writing it there's a lurking fear of loss. Now it's a question of going into more depth on the matter, although the most important event has already happened. Pearl! The most horrible

thing from which I suffer is a sickness of will (or faint spirit), of course. Insecurity accompanies it. 1% improvement for me is already an accomplishment. Maybe I am even more pathetic in your eyes when I complain, but perhaps not! Before me is a whole energetic apparatus (*fundus*) which is new and unusual for me.

What follows? What follows? What follows? But there is something profoundly new in me. Perhaps I am on my way to "humanity"?

Or maybe this is nonsense? But only the brain can be mistaken. Arms and legs (*and something else!*) don't lie and are not dependent on logic and its erroneous conclusions!
Do you hear that from the mouth of a superintellectual type as I am!?!

Willpower. It's not surprising that the question of willpower becomes central for my "investigations."

It appears to me now as a reaction not to direct stimulus, but to an earlier one or at least one that is not perceived by an observer to be part of the same field of action.

So the question of freedom of the will is absolutely analogous to the question of faith in the conception of children from a "spirit" based on the fact that for a savage the 9 months which pass between the conception and giving birth was too long a period to capture a causality link.

Will is a reaction to an outside stimulus of power greater than that of the direct one, and therefore the insubordination of the responsive reaction according to the usual automatic form of response to this stimulation appears as a fact of *libre arbitre*.

From the viewpoint of reflexology: unconditional stimulus (with its foreseeable unconditional previously known response reflexes) turns out in this particular case to be a conditional stimulus therefore provoking something which does not correspond to its usual automatic response manifestation.

In general, will is what's most spontaneous in us!

(I believe that Spinoza is absolutely right in defining will as an idea that has reached such a level of intensity that it becomes action (or something like that)—that is quite right and is in accordance with our views: idea is the maximum thought. Thought is the maximum impediment of the

reflex; i.e., nondiscarded stimulus. From here follows: an active act of will is the result of a summing of passive statements on stimuli (there's even a dialectic to it!).

Maybe none of it is new. But the issue is not novelty but practical articulation. The problem of expressive movement, as you remember, includes will as constituting the conflict. We should become clearer on this [issue] (pathologically in so many ways—what a great field for vivisection—autovivisection!).

Tell me what you think about this.

What's going on in Soyuzkino? I sent you by telegraph a request onto their address.

How are they treating our project?

How are things in general?

Now we are "earning" the army—making a picture in three days about Mexican sport. For this we'll have *all the facilities*.

I am very eager to start *Soldadera* (but at Sinclair's something is stuck temporarily again, so we need to finish the smaller scenes now).

The weather is wonderful—not a cloud! Oysters are disappearing (here it's fishermen's food) and lobsters are coming in again (I am writing this on purpose to make you angry!). I am in love and I want to work!

I am extremely glad about the failure of Piscator—Mezhrabpom deserved it for bringing shit into the country!

I hug you tenderly. Waiting for good letters and remain . . . a little student ("old man" doesn't at all fit someone in love!)

4

THE "EPILOGUE"

In this chapter I will further develop Eisenstein's use of the baroque aesthetic, which in the previous chapter was linked to Eisenstein's concept of bisexuality, transformative drive, and, ultimately, to his concept of ex-stasis. This chapter will situate the discussion of the baroque historically and politically, linking it to Eisenstein's representation of the Day of the Dead in the "Epilogue." Eisenstein's interest in the baroque will be analyzed in terms of its insistence on the nonlinearity of historical development, placing Eisenstein's treatment of this subject in contact with Walter Benjamin's work, and their respective understandings of the notion of a dialectical image.

The "Epilogue" to *¡Que Viva Mexico!* is the best known and arguably the most picturesque part of the film, due to the fact that its subject, the festival of the Day of the Dead, has since become one of the most celebrated aspects of Mexican culture. This development must be attributed at least in part to Eisenstein's images, which have been circulated as film stills in many journals and books worldwide ever since the footage was shot. But it is also because Eisenstein's acute aesthetic sense allowed him to isolate the visual material which was so resonant in the cultural imagination of the masses that it has since become a cliché; in fact, some coverage of the Day of the Dead in Mexico has become a staple of every first-year Spanish textbook that attempts to address the "cultural specificities" of Latin American countries.

The obvious success of the visual images and their cultural resonance, however, is not the only reason why the "Epilogue" is particularly significant in the film. Eisenstein intended that this final episode bring together and synthesize all the themes and theoretical concerns behind the film. It was in the "Epilogue" that the dialectical shift, of which he wrote so extensively in discussing his conception of the film, was supposed to take place. Thus the "Epilogue" of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* provides a satisfying focus for addressing all the questions behind this investigation. Like the "Epilogue" itself, this part of the manuscript will be both its last chapter and its conclusion, a place for restating and synthesizing all the themes and theoretical concerns of the previous chapters.

THE FOOTAGE

The "Epilogue"—or "The Day of The Dead" ("El Dia de los Muertos")—contains some of the most celebrated footage from the film. Some of it was shot soon after the crew's arrival in Mexico, but most of it was done later, in September through November of 1931. Besides the footage of the celebrations of the Day of the Dead itself, the "Epilogue" was meant to include images of modern Mexico, in particular a series shot in the Tolteca cement factory, and footage of the president of Mexico, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, and his government. This footage is not included in any of the restored versions of the film, despite the fact that in all versions of the script the "Epilogue," in contrast with the rest of the film, was intended to contain images of new, modern, postrevolutionary Mexico.

The October 1931 version of the script, written at the time when most of the material for the "Epilogue" was being shot, reads as follows:

> Sixth Story ("Epilogue")
>
> Here we show modern, progressive Mexico with its art, industry, and other forms of progress that result from the Revolution. This story will contain various scenes of natural beauty such as Michoacan, etc. It will show a liberated people and a highly modern civilization, containing scenes of the Chapultapec Fountain and Castle, the modern army, possibly the Independence Celebration and other of the most modern phases of Mexico we can find.[1]

In most of the earlier versions of the script, the celebration of the Day of the Dead was meant to be included in the "Prologue," originally entitled "Calavera" ("The Skull"), and the "Epilogue" was to contain only the footage of modern Mexico. However, after submitting this version of the script to the Mexican censors, in the course of the following months

Eisenstein evidently decided to divide all the material that explicitly dealt with the representation of death between the "Prologue" and the "Epilogue." Thus in the final version, much of the material originally intended for the "Prologue" was moved to the "Epilogue." This allowed for the narrative structure of the film that most critics have referred to as "the eternal circle." In fact, thematically the "Epilogue" mimics the "Prologue," but, at the same time, rather than merely returning to the same theme of death, the "Epilogue" develops and significantly changes the method of representation. Consequently it is more appropriate to call the structure of the film a spiral (consistent with the form of the *Spiral Book*, which Eisenstein had been working on just a few years earlier).[2]

POSADA

The "Epilogue" was meant to be dedicated to José Guadalupe Posada, a Mexican folk artist and illustrator of popular songs (*corridos*) of the early twentieth century, who was later appropriated by the muralists—in particular by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Charlot—as their main artistic influence. As I discussed in chapter 1, Posada's prints first came to Eisenstein's attention in Moscow in the 1920s and made an unforgettable impression on him. He later saw them again in Anita Brenner's *Idols Behind the Altars*, where she reprinted and discussed examples of Posada's art, as well as in the writings of Carleton Beals. Upon his arrival in Mexico Eisenstein found a book of Posada's prints, which later decorated his office in Moscow. In his memoirs and in his later notes from the 1940s, he refers to these images as the original impulse for his interest in Mexican culture.[3] The choice of Posada, a prerevolutionary folk artist, for the final chapter of a film that was meant to show the revolutionary potential of modernized Mexico may seem paradoxical. However, it is a choice completely consistent with the way that Posada was appropriated by the main ideologues of postrevolutionary Mexican art. In the chapter on Posada in her book, Anita Brenner calls him "the prophet of the two revolutions, both violent," referring to the actual uprising of 1910–17 and the ideology of the Mexican Revolution, associated with a return to "national" roots.[4]

Posada's prints combine a medieval and baroque tradition of allegory with the style of popular Mexican arts. These prints were used for social and political satire; many of them were illustrations for popular protorevolutionary songs. Visually, the prints are similar to the *lubok* (cheap book) tradition in Russia, which during the 1910s and 1920s was famously incorporated in their work by Russian futurists and other avant-garde

artists. They turned to lubok for reasons similar to those that attracted Mexican artists to their folk sources: both rejected the academic classical tradition, prevalent in nineteenth-century art, and contended that a new national culture should draw on the more archaic—and, hence, popular and less alienated—art forms.[5]

Aside from these shared rationales for turning to vernacular traditions, what makes Posada's art in particular so memorable and important for the muralists, and consequently for Eisenstein, was the allegorical use of skulls and skeletons as the principal images. These representations serve as markers and reminders of traditional Mexican culture, and are rich in resonances with their folk roots and pre-Hispanic references, which came to emblematize the new Mexican cultural identity. But they also have another function. Posada's images of skulls and skeletons emphasize the violence to be found in the verses they illustrate and in their social messages (the deadliness of the regime, the suffering of the people), and they act as a call to a violent revolution. Posada had an "extraordinary capacity for expressing the gestures, problems, hopes of the oppressed classes."[6] The image of death as a leveler of all differences, and, hence, as an expression of equality, which comes from the baroque tradition, served Posada as a symbolic mimesis for executing his task of political criticism.[7] Posada chose a popular artisan form for his art—etchings and graphics—though his illustrations were nonetheless reproduced as mass art. By blending preindustrial folk art forms and motifs with mass-produced popular culture of the twentieth century, Posada in his own way reestablished the dialectics, so dear to Eisenstein, of the premodern as the foundation for the ultramodern in the service of the revolution.

Through Eisenstein's visual references to Posada in the "Epilogue," representation of death acquires an additional political context. The iconography of the Mexican Revolution, in which Posada occupied the place of the prophet, designated the reading of the celebration of the Day of the Dead as a protorevolutionary event. Although written much later, Octavio Paz's description of the Day of the Dead that alludes specifically to Posada's images is consistent with Brenner's, as it underlines this notion of the revolutionary impulse behind the celebration as "a revolt, a sudden immersion in the formless, in pure being. . . . The fiesta is a revolution in the most literal sense of the word. . . . To express it in another way, the fiesta denies society as an organic system of differentiated forms and principles, but it affirms it as a source of creative energy."[8] This reading both affirms Mexico's revolutionary potential through its popular heritage and emphasizes the necessary reversal of the destructive (violent and deadly) and the life affirming as a revolutionary necessity, the dialectics

of violence and peace. This is the dialectic that is also at the center of the "Epilogue" to *¡Que Viva Mexico!*

Eisenstein describes the action of the "Epilogue" as follows:

> Time and location—modern Mexico. Factories, railroads, harbors with enormous boats, Chapultepec castle, parks, museums, schools, sports-grounds. The people of today. Leaders of the country. Generals. Engineers. Aviators. Builders of new Mexico. And children—the future people of future Mexico. The work of factories. Modern . . . civilized . . . industrial Mexico appears on the screen. But if you look closer, you will behold in the land and in the cities the same faces—faces that bear close resemblance to those who held a funeral of antiquity in Yucatan, those who danced in Tehuantepec, those who sang the Alabado behind the tall walls, those who danced in queer costumes around the temples, those who fought and died in the battles of revolution. The same faces—but different people. A new civilized nation.
>
> But, what is that? Death comes along dancing! Not just one death; many skulls, skeletons. . . . This is a remarkable Mexican day, when Mexicans recall the past and show their contempt of death.
>
> The film begins with the realm of death. With victory of life over death, the film ends. Life brims from under the cardboard skeletons, life gushes forth, and death retreats, fades away.
>
> A happy little Indian carefully removes his death-mask and smiles a contagious smile—he impersonates the new growing Mexico.[9]

THE DAY OF THE DEAD

Eisenstein's shots of the celebration of the Day of the Dead can be grouped into several categories: cemetery shots, where people mourn their dead, but also eat, drink, and "make love"; close-ups of various Mexican toys, which accompany the celebration; toy skeletons, skulls, and sugar skulls, which are eaten by children; real skeletons, dressed up as various characters, most of which allude to negative characters in Eisenstein's movie, but also represent stock characters in the popular Mexican theater (the general, the hacendado, and so on); and a group of people wearing skull masks, some of them dancing, with a background of a Ferris wheel and other carnavalesque constructions, associated with the popular amusement parks in Mexico, all of which are circular in shape. Finally, the people take off their skull masks revealing their faces while the skeletons remove their death masks only to reveal real skulls behind them.

Figure 32. Image from the "Epilogue." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

The composition of the shots has one thing in common with much of the rest of film, a feature, which was completely new for Eisenstein and is still not associated with his famous filmmaking style: deep focus.[10] Similar (or identical) to the shots in the "Prologue," where the faces of the Mexican Indians are visually juxtaposed to the stone faces of their ancestors, both the faces and the background are equally in focus, which significantly distorts the proportions. Unlike most other instances of the use of deep focus, the camera does not cover much profilmic space, nor is it linked to long shots or long takes, but instead the effect is used to bring together the objects in the foreground with the background and make them clash visually.

But in this respect, completely unlike the "Prologue," the shots are anything but static—they are characterized by constant movement, both in the foreground and in the background. Even the dolls are made to move. And unlike the "Prologue," all the actors are looking directly into the camera after they remove their masks, adding to the impression of life and vitality. The most telling image in this respect is perhaps the last shot of the film, where it is revealed that behind the mask of death—a skull—is a young boy, smiling and brimming with life. Equally characteristic is the sequence of a dance of skeletons in which death is paradoxically depicted as full of humor and joy.

The image of the mask is operational: both life and death are only a matter of disguise, of dressing up, where one mimics the other. Mimicry and metamorphosis here reach their full potential: not only are there people posing as dead gods (as in the "Prologue"), but death masks alternatively reveal either people full of life, or more skulls, as in the case with the representative of the "dead" social classes, where "the act of unmasking represents the continuation of the class struggle."[11] However tempting it may be to link the symbolism of removing of masks with the slogan "tear off all and every mask" widely circulated in the Soviet press and official speeches and used in exposing the ever-growing number of "enemies of the people," here the masks are not just any disguises, but masks of death. Their symbolic significance, as we shall see later, is very different for Eisenstein from that of the commonly used Stalinist slogan.

The Day of the Dead and Mexico's peculiar relationship to the figure of death have become programmatic features of Mexicans' own understanding of their national identity. This identification has been facilitated by the writings of such diverse figures as Alfonso Reyes ("La muerte es la eternal novia de los mexicanos"), Xavier Villaurrutia ("La muerte toma siempre la forma de la alcoba que nos contiene"), and Neftali Beltran ("en Mexico la idea de la muerte es como el aire").[12] In such works, the roots of this fascination with death are frequently located in Mexico's heritage, both pre-Columbian and viridian, but it has also been influenced to no small extent by the proliferation of these images in the descriptions of Mexico by famous foreigners.

Many non-Mexican writers who visited the country in the twentieth century have emphasized death in relation to Mexico. For example, D. H. Lawrence, who influenced Eisenstein profoundly and whose novels he read while in Mexico, is perhaps most typical in this trend and characteristic in his portrayal of the country. His *Plumed Serpent* (1926), which was read by Eisenstein before his trip, outlines many of the motifs to be found in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* Along with a major preoccupation with the theme and images of death, it depicts bullfights, the supposed androgyny of the Mexican people, and the symbolic weight of the Aztec gods (the title of the novel refers to Quetzalcoatl). Similar issues are raised by such other astute observers of Mexican life and culture as Malcolm Lowry in *Under the Volcano*, and Katherine Anne Porter in her various short stories. By making the relationship of the Mexicans to death one of the central themes of his film, Eisenstein reinforced, as well as reflected, the cultural preoccupations that formed the contemporary iconography and cultural identity of Mexico. Similar to the way that Eisenstein sought to present different epochs and cultures as if simultaneously present in Mexico, the

representation of death in the film both refers to, and is informed by, several sources at once: pre-Columbian mythology, the baroque, and the popular tradition as it was appropriated for ideological purposes by the muralist movement, especially by Diego Rivera.

Although pre-Columbian Mexican cultures and rituals are most frequently quoted as the source of Eisenstein's eternal circle, the baroque tradition of the representation of life and death played a role that was at least of equal importance to the development of Eisenstein's ideas and their manifestations on film. The idea of the circularity of life and death is part of baroque cosmology. As a reflection of it, figures of death occupy a privileged place in the baroque iconography. Death, like earthly life itself, is understood as transitory, a station on the way to eternal life that ultimately leads to moral lessons. The history of the celebration of the Day of the Dead in Mexico is ultimately linked to the tradition of the baroque moral allegory.

THE DAY OF THE DEAD AND THE BAROQUE CULTURE

The origins of the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead go back to the encounter between, on the one side, the Spanish conquistadores and the monastic orders that accompanied them, who brought over the tradition from Spain of a day of remembrance, of "eternal rest of the souls," and dedicated specifically to the martyred saints (which is why it is also known as All Saints Day) and, on the other side, indigenous mortuary celebrations involving baked-dough images of gods—for instance, the Aztec god Uitzilopotchli.[13] The Jesuits contributed to this festival of devotion with great splendor as an occasion to pay respect to the various relics of the saints and sacred images, the cult of which was brought by missionaries to the indigenous villages, as was apparently the case in Poland and Byelorussia as well as elsewhere in the Catholic world. Evangelical theater (dance and allegorical plays known as *Danza Macabra*) constituted the central part of the celebration, and was intended to trigger the spectator's reflection on his or her mundane life in the face of inevitable death. In this funeral dance, figures dressed as the pope and the emperor, as well as lords and knights, prostitutes and children (as in the images from the episode "Fiesta" in *¡Que Viva Mexico!*) all participated—the message being that death takes all, regardless of social status or age.[14] Thus another symbolic message behind the figure of the circle in the baroque tradition is the reminder that power is transitory—a lesson, as Yuri Tsivian demonstrates in his study of *Ivan the Terrible*, that is also behind much of the imagery of Eisenstein's last film.[15]

In the baroque tradition, death is seen as marking the beginning of life as it truly is, that is, eternal life. Paradoxically, then, it is death itself that is the origin of life, while all living things in the mundane world are marked by decay. The various allegorical representations of the baroque body and even more specifically of the skull or skeleton reflect this duality. In Mexico, the death skulls that were used as part of the rituals were, in part, a legacy from pre-Hispanic times, but their allegorical use coincided with themes endogenous to the European baroque. Historically, the baroque as a style can also be seen as a reaction to the crisis of authority which led to the formation of the modern state in the seventeenth century—in the case of the Spanish baroque it was the Spanish absolutist monarchy, which, according to Schlegel, served as a prototype for all the modern states in Europe.[16] The baroque corresponds to a moment of radical reorganization of the social sphere, when the conflicts between the old and the new forms of economic production and state power produced a major crisis. According to Jose Antonio Maravall's influential study of baroque culture in Spain, it was a "culture of crisis," expressing a hegemonic response to the threat posed on both the ideological level, by challenges to the monopoly of the church's ultimate authority over all domains of knowledge, and the political level, by newly assertive combinations of nobles and the great bourgeois families. Maravall famously argues that baroque culture and aesthetics were essentially rearguard, conservative movements aimed at preserving traditional society.[17]

If we follow this formulation of the sociohistorical preconditions for the baroque, it may not be surprising that this culture of crisis and the aesthetics associated with it were repeatedly re-evoked in the twentieth century, starting from the interwar period in Europe and later in Latin American culture, where it became almost synonymous with the culture of hybridity and uneven development. Eisenstein's use of baroque aesthetics and, in the case of the "Epilogue," specifically his use of the allegory of the skull and the representation of death associated with it is consistent with such a reading. The solidification of central feudal power in the seventeenth century, stimulated as a reaction to the spirit of early modernity and the advent of capitalism, may have been conservative and even reactionary. But the appropriation of baroque styles and a baroque hermaneutic in the twentieth century came, in a dialectical turn, to be seen as progressive, as providing a powerful critique of the hegemony of the modern state. In the twenties and thirties, when aggressive modernization (in particular of the countryside in Russia) became the characteristic task of the state agenda, a critique of modernity and of the modern state inherent in the baroque ethos could be seen by an avant-garde in

search of a form of resistance to various kinds of monopoly power (of the state, of imperialism, of corporate cartels, of hegemonic cultural institutions) as offering a set of procedures that could be refunctionalized to serve progressive ends.

While we have already explored the relationship of the baroque excess to homoeroticism and Eisenstein's theories of the bi-sex and protoplasm as relevant to "Fiesta" and "Maguey," the function of the skull within baroque allegory allows us an opportunity to address another question, one of major importance to Eisenstein's conception of his Mexican film. What attracted Eisenstein, as well as other dialectical materialist thinkers, to the baroque aesthetic? How does the baroque tie in with the "dialectical image" that is so important to Eisenstein?

LATIN AMERICAN BAROQUE AND THE CULTURE OF MODERNITY

Mexican art historian Bolívar Echeverría frames his discussion of the Mexican baroque by pointing to the main contradiction of modernity as that of the value of work being subsumed under the exchange value necessary for the accumulation of capital, a notion Echeverría evidently takes from Marx. Ethos is what negotiates the multiple tensions arising from the triumph of exchange value and harmonizes them—in other words, ethos plays the function of ideology. From this point of view, the baroque aesthetic of excess emerges as a way of submitting the riches of emergent capital to another and older logic, one in which wealth no longer disappears into the variable and abstract role it plays in the capitalist framework, but reassumes its material and sacred existence. In the original baroque aesthetic, which presupposes the traditional Christian point of view, capital as merely the accumulative instance of exchange takes on the value of death—in the same way that, as St. Paul says, the law is death—and its redemption is a matter of returning it to the order of life. This affirmation in the historical age of the baroque (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) depends on the theology of the resurrection and the eternal life; however, the same paradigm will function for the modern age.

According to Echeverría, the baroque ethos in Latin America is an especially good example of a negation of the established cultural norms because it arose from the destruction of another cultural system—pre-Columbian culture—from which the Latin American baroque took the materials to create its forms of excess. The violent rupture of colonization gave an impetus to the baroque in the New World that allowed it to take a purer form rather than that embedded in and more continuous with

earlier ideologies and cultures, as in the Old World. After Cortez's conquest, the crucial role played by the Jesuits in the social and cultural life of Mexico promoted the spread of baroque culture, as happened anywhere the Jesuits played a major role in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Jesuits were simply at the vanguard of the Catholic Church's attempt to counter the emerging individualist modernity of capitalism, and the New World presented a field for the Catholic alternative relatively uncontested by the protocapitalist nation-states. Consequently, the (peripheral) indigenous civilization was forced to affirm the new (dominant) culture and accept it in spite of the natural negation; it had to follow the baroque process of making something out of (and with) the negation itself, turning the negative into the positive by displacing, transgressing, and exaggerating it. It is this mixed regime of negations that allows us to read baroque aesthetics and ideology in the twentieth century, especially in Latin America, where these negations were most rooted, as a form of cultural subversion of existing (capitalist) modernity.[18]

Thus, the renewed focus on the baroque aesthetic can be understood as another way to subvert the reality of modernity and imagine it otherwise. Politically, this links such diverse thinkers as Eisenstein and Benjamin, who were, albeit in different ways, engaged in this same project as part of their modernist avant-garde ethos.[19]

While bringing Walter Benjamin into a discussion of Eisenstein's Mexican film may seem like a strange choice, bringing Eisenstein's text into dialogue with Benjamin brings out with additional force some of the major themes Eisenstein's film explores: the baroque, and the subthemes of allegory, the emblematic centrality of the skull, myth, prelogical thinking, and dialectics. Moving between an artist and a critic who shared a fascination with the baroque, a heretical form of Marxism, and a keen sense of themselves as figures on the side of the modern, allows us further to bring *¡Que Viva Mexico!* out of the critical isolation it suffers from by being considered as referring, constantly, to Eisenstein's intentions, instead of referencing the conceptual milieu in which Eisenstein was working. Systematically counterpointing Benjamin to Eisenstein in the section that follows makes the introduction of Benjamin a real aid to understanding Eisenstein and the way his orientation to the Mexican baroque catalyzed his thinking and the art he did afterwards. What follows, then, is a discussion of Benjamin's highly theorized notion of allegory, the baroque, and the tie between the prehistoric and the modern for the light it throws on Eisenstein's project.

We don't know that Eisenstein, in fact, ever read any of Benjamin's work. We do know that Benjamin saw and commented on Eisenstein's

films, however, particularly *Potemkin*, about which Benjamin wrote a polemical essay in 1927, when it was shown in Berlin. Miriam Hansen has suggested that this essay presented elements for the aesthetic that Benjamin later elaborated in his much more famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."[20] However, I am going to pursue another set of attractions between Benjamin and Eisenstein that predates Benjamin's knowledge of Eisenstein's work: namely, Benjamin's treatment of baroque allegory, specifically the images of the skull and the dead. I am going to put Benjamin's treatment of these motifs in relation to the same motifs in Eisenstein's "Epilogue" in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* Both thinkers use baroque allegory to structure their ongoing projects of creating radically new constructions of history; each took the baroque as a touchstone for their theories of art (which in both cases are inseparable from their political projects). A closer look at Benjamin's formulation of the baroque as a critical model, employed in the service of radical social transformation, can elucidate Eisenstein's treatment of the same thematic.

WALTER BENJAMIN AND THE BAROQUE

Walter Benjamin's work *On the Origins of the German Baroque Drama* (*Trauerspiel*, 1924), which deals precisely with baroque allegory as embodied in the image of the skull, was the theoretical foundation upon which he hoped to erect his unfinished masterpiece, *The Arcades Project* (*Passagen-Werk*), a project upon which Benjamin worked intermittently from 1927 until his death in 1940. Benjamin's study of baroque allegory is linked to his ambitious attempt to resurrect history in particular objects and endow them once again with the life that had been taken away from them through capitalist commodification. The goal of the *Arcades Project* is ultimately to produce a vision of a utopian revolutionary future that is not historically predetermined, but a result of truly radical historical rupture. What Benjamin saw in Moscow on his trip to Russia in 1926–27 (aside from the growing political repression, of which he became keenly aware) proved to him that the Soviet Revolution had resulted in the same system of commodified objects, the same "deadened" life and productivist regime as was being established in other industrial economies. Benjamin's model for bringing out true change, as it emerges from his *Trauerspiel* book and the *Arcades Project*, depends on finding in everyday objects traces of their prehistory, the impress of which remains in them like the trace of former life forms in fossils. This prehistory is essentially utopian, but he contends that it is out of this utopian impulse that a true revolutionary

change can emerge. It is through a dialectical shift that this potential is released: "These tendencies turn the image fantasy, that maintains its impulse from the new, back to the ur-past. In the dream in which every epoch sees in images the epoch that follows, the later appears wedded to the elements of ur-history, that is, of a classless society. Its experiences, which have their storage place in the collective, produce, in their interpenetration with the new, the utopia that has left its trace behind in a thousand configurations of life."[21] For Benjamin, in Moscow as in Paris or Berlin, everyday objects retained traces of prehistory out of which revolutionary potential could be resurrected. Images of commodities such as folk art sold everywhere in the stores in Russia as elsewhere—like religious symbols in an earlier era—store fantasy energy for social transformation, but in their reified form. Richard Wolin, in *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, gives a less than utopian take on Benjamin's concept:

> The theoretical focal point of the study [of the *Arcades*] would be the concept of the "prehistory of the nineteenth century" ("Urgeschichte des 19ten Jahrhunderts") or a "prehistory of the modern." Just as the *Trauerspiel* book had probed behind the ruins of the baroque age to reveal the underlying conception of history as "natural history," in the *Arcades Project* Benjamin intended in a similar vein to exhume rudiments of prehistory—such as myth, fate, and the always-the-same—beneath the apparent phantasmagoria of nouveauté, the fantastic array of commodities and innovations that swept the nineteenth century under the banner of "the modern."[22]

According to Wolin, Benjamin's intention was therefore less to demonstrate how manifestations of prehistory themselves recurred in the modern than to show how the modern itself regressed to the level of prehistory. Or, more precisely, he sought to demonstrate how the phantasmagorical proliferation of new commodities that distinguished urban life under conditions of nineteenth-century capitalism constituted a regression to the notion of "eternal recurrence" or "mythical repetition."[23] But Wolin, too, recognizes a utopian aspect of prehistory—from the point of view of a classless society: "for the 'old,' classless society will ultimately become the 'new' or utopia; and the 'new,' the ruins of modernity, will at this point turn into the 'old'—i.e. prehistory in the Marxian sense. Consequently, the ruins of modernity, eminently displayed in the poetry of Baudelaire . . . suggested to Benjamin a network of correspondences with prehistory—correspondences which he viewed as the ultimate stimulus to utopia or a classless society."[24] This formulation implies a certain equation between the images of the

various commodities of the modern era, which Benjamin explores in his *Arcades Projects*, and the religious symbols of the baroque—specifically the skulls.

This overall artistic approach shares a hermeneutic and utopian aspiration with Eisenstein's, rooted in a set of common ethnological sources. Both focus on the connection of prehistory with a classless society in which the objects exchanged within it are extracted from their commodity forms, and on a dialectical shift that the critical intelligence has to undergo in order to see the link between the modern technological system and prehistoric ritual. These elements are, as we have repeatedly seen throughout this study, essential to Eisenstein's conception of art as it emerged from the time he spent in Mexico. He sees the dialectical shift as the only way to negotiate between the necessarily regressive (mythological, prelogical) and the modern, achieving thereby a leap to the classless society. This insistence on dialectical method is why Eisenstein repeatedly quotes Engels in his meditations on prelogical thinking.

What constitutes prehistory for Benjamin—and for Eisenstein, as clearly emerges from his subsequent writings—is precisely the prelogical or sensual thinking that predates modern consciousness. For Eisenstein, it is at the same time a human biological prehistory, which he links to the prenatal state. He sees the images of Mexico—the pre-Columbian temples and the baroque buildings alike—as retaining traces of this prehistory. Similarly, Benjamin's governing metaphor of a fossil, of life petrified, stems from seeing the form of life codified in the system of sacred objects in the European baroque and in the commodities of modern industrial society. This gives us a useful gloss on the interplay between life and petrification and its reversals in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* The visual effect of the film's beginning is that of petrification of human flesh, which is underlined in Alexandrov's version of the film by the sequence "Stones—Gods—Men." These are both gods and men cast in stone; the statues, ruins, and inhabitants alike convey "a sense of their existence as prehistoric."[25] It is this prehistory of civilization and of human development that Eisenstein wants to resurrect on the screen through a dialectical shift. The ultimate goal of this resurrection is, as in Benjamin, the possibility of a true work of art, a progressive work of art, which would be inseparable from a vision of a progressive future. What is at stake in Eisenstein's theory of art, as it is in Benjamin's, is a vision of a radical utopian future. Naum Kleiman in his foreword to *Metod* (a collection of Eisenstein's essays) makes this very clear: "A shift to the earlier forms of thought could be justified (and Eisenstein believed that!) because they corresponded to an earlier, preclass social organization which

was to be reborn on a new level in the postclass, classless society, which was officially announced to be the Communist ideal. This thesis for him was the starting point and the ultimate credo, and not merely a way to avoid ideological attacks. And he constantly returned to it. . . ."[26] Kleiman cites as his evidence notes from Eisenstein's diaries, quoted earlier: "The method of art as the model for the social ideal at all times (classlessness as the highest 'forward' and the deepest 'back'). The synthesis of the logical formula and the prelogical form, i.e., the highest point of the progress of consciousness—the reflection of contemporary (for each moment) stage of the social development, and prelogic, reflecting always and in all cases the same—the preclass stage."[27] In 1939 Eisenstein kept a separate folder with jottings regarding these ideas and titled it "Utopia."[28] Here, as also in the notes to Anita Brenner, his artistic theories on which he was working so productively in Mexico (which is why his later writings take images from his Mexican film as key examples from his whole oeuvre) are built into his vision of a future synthesis of the prehistoric and a society in which the hegemony of exchange value and class division has been dissolved. In "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (1935), Benjamin provides the manifest for the connection between the technostructure of modernity, the rejection of the obsolete, and the renewal of interest in the prehistoric (*Urgeschichte*):

> Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old, are images in the collective consciousness in which the new is permeated with the old. These images are wish images; in them, the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social product, and the inadequacies in the social organization of production. At the same time, what emerges in these wish images is the resolute effort to distance oneself from all that is antiquated—which includes, however, the recent past. These tendencies deflect the imagination (which is given impetus by the new back upon the primal past). In the dream in which each past epoch entertains images of its successor, the latter appears wedded to elements of primal history (Urgeschichte)—that is, to elements of a classless society. And the experiences of such a society—as stored in the unconscious of the collective—engender, through interpenetration with what is new, the Utopia that has left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions.[29]

Given the coincidence of motifs between these two figures, it is of interest to see how Benjamin modeled the dialectical shift on the way

baroque artists employed the allegorical mode as exemplified by the image of the skull. Benjamin's exegesis of the image helps us to understand Eisenstein's own use of it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ALLEGORICAL MODE TO MODERN ART

Benjamin's understanding and use of the allegory in relation to art is best expressed in his much-quoted passage that places the image of the skull at its center:

> Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, expresses itself in a countenance—or rather a death's head . . . this is the form in which man's subjection to nature is most pronounced and it gives rise to the enigmatic question not only of the nature of human existence as such but of the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the core of the allegorical way of seeing, of the baroque, secular account of history as the Passion of the world, a world that is meaningful only in the stations of decay. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical being and significance.[30]

Compare this use of the skull with that of Eisenstein:

> Both the face like a skull and the skull like a face . . . One living above the other. One concealed beneath the other. One living an independent life through the other. One in turn shining through the other. One and the other, repeating the physical schema of the process through the play of images of face and skull, of changing masks.[31]

Through reading these two texts together it becomes clear that for Benjamin the first dialectical shift, the leap from physical being to significance is understood in a similar manner as the leap, for Eisenstein, from the skull to the face, and from the face to the mask. Benjamin, then, moves from the skull to the importance of the allegorical mode.

For Benjamin, the baroque is the real precursor to the art of the modern age because of the former's dependence on the allegorical mode,

which Benjamin, citing Baudelaire, sees as the hallmark of modernism. In addition, baroque allegory could be seen as a model for Benjamin's own critical project. Once again, what is at stake here for Benjamin is a construction of a mode of temporality that could provide an alternative to all the existing constructions of history. This new mode of temporality, however, would not be deterministic; hence, it would allow for the possibility of true change. It would link the redemptive and revolutionary projects. This is a new construction of history that can only display itself through artistic as well as everyday objects (given that the two for Benjamin are dialectically linked). It is the objects—and images—themselves and their status that are at the center of Benjamin's ideas, which he later developed in his unfinished *Arcades Project*.

Peter Burger's influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde* provides the following capsule summary of Benjamin's allegorical schema: "The allegorist pulls one element out of the totality of the life context, isolating it, depriving it of its function. Allegory then is essentially fragment and thus the opposite of the organic symbol. 'The false appearance of totality is extinguished' (*Trauerspiel* 176). Allegorist joins the isolated in reality fragments and thereby creates meaning. This is a posited meaning; it does not derive from the original context of the fragments. 'Life has flown out' of the objects which the allegorist takes up, and thus he gives it meaning." Allegory represents history as decline, as "the deathmask of history, a petrified primordial landscape."[32] As Burger further notes, "A comparison of the organic and nonorganic (avant-gardiste) work of art from a production-aesthetic point of view finds essential support in the circumstance that the first two elements of Benjamin's concept of allegory accord with what may be understood as 'montage.'"[33] Although by "montage," Burger is not referring here to cinematic montage specifically, but rather to a much broader artistic technique (used by the surrealists, Picasso, and so on); it may be useful to consider its connections to Eisenstein's concept of dialectical montage as well. If, on the level of production, a mystical experience may help achieve the leap necessary for the creation of meaning in montage, on the level of reception it mirrors Eisenstein's idea of the "montage of attractions" and the shock it is meant to produce in the viewer. But on the level of the artwork (filmic image) itself, the leap required is achieved through a process very similar to the one described by Benjamin as a feature of baroque allegory. In *¡Que Viva Mexico!* it is best embodied, as it is in Benjamin's baroque, by the image of a skull.

The emblem of the skull in Benjamin's writings can be read in two ways. It represents the human spirit petrified, surrendered to one form

of natural time; but it also stands for nature in decay in that it is a marker of the transformation of the corpse into a skeleton that will turn into dust, and so posits itself against the classical body, with its system of the typical, the ideal. Allegory, according to Benjamin, is baroque's mode of representing the world, recognizing the arbitrariness of the sign, that is to say, the nonhuman in the most essentially human of structures, and mediating history as nature in decay and ruins:

> Allegory, of course, thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it: the secret, privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of a world without hope. All this vanishes with this *one* about-turn in which the immersion of allegory has to clear away the final phantasmagoria of the objective and, left entirely to its own devices, rediscovers itself, not playfully in the earthly world of things but seriously under the eyes of heaven. And this is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection.[34]

Through allegorical reading, Benjamin contends, life and all that is living are seen as symbols of decay; the living are thus deadened while the dead—the skull, the skeleton—are what is of essence. In the words of Susan Buck-Morss, "'Transitoriness' is not only signified, not only represented allegorically, but is in itself a sign, presented as allegory: the allegory of Resurrection. Ultimately, in the signs of death of the baroque—if only in the redemptive return of its great arc—the allegorical outlook makes an about turn. 'Yea, when the Highest comes to reap the graveyard harvest / Then will I, a death-skull, become an angel's face.'"[35]

THE SKULL AS AN ALLEGORICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The image of the skull in the baroque is, then, not merely one among other instances of allegory but actually an allegory about the allegorical process itself. If this is true for Benjamin, it finds a correspondence in Eisenstein, at least if we follow Mikhail Iampolskii's discussion of the importance of the skull in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* and, in general, the privileged role of the skeleton in Eisenstein's theory of mimesis. The skeletal motif, argues Iampolskii, can serve as a metaphor for Eisenstein's search for what he called

Figure 33. Image from "Fiesta." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

Figure 34. Sergei Eisenstein during the shooting for "Fiesta." Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

"the principle" (or, later, "the method") that would reveal matter while going beyond mere representation. In this extended metaphor, the skeleton is analogous in Eisenstein's thought to that essential line, which in a "montage of the attractions" links the body of the spectator to the visual image on the screen through the movement of the viewer's eye following the outline of the visual image. This process, according to Eisenstein, mirrors an ecstatic out-of-body experience. Although Iampolskii seems to affirm the primary role of the bone structure (as a metaphor for the "real form") and its independence from the flesh of the body (i.e., from representation, the body of the text), Eisenstein's texts hardly support the rigidity implied by this hierarchy. The paradox of the image of the bones is that if, for Eisenstein, it is a metaphor for real form, for the principle and the order of things, it is also a metaphor for the life force and its energy, its essence. Thus an image culled from the order of death stands for life in one of these typical Eisensteinian reversals and shifts, and form becomes its essence, the skeleton, as it were, "comes to life." Likewise, for Eisenstein the mask—and the process of theatrical metamorphosis, of constant change—and its artifice are, paradoxically (or rather, once again, dialectically), the figure of the essential, (*mesto predela vyrazitel'nosti*) as the "end point of artistic expression": his Method.[36]

Eisenstein was also interested in the questions of myth and allegory that he explores in his writings, linking them once again to the subject that is of greatest interest to him—prelogical thinking and the regress to human prehistory. In his memoirs of 1946 he makes the following observation: "Allegory (consists) of an abstracted representation intentionally and arbitrarily assuming the form (*odevaetsia*) of a particular image. The figurative form of the expression is then like a myth—the one accessible means of making it familiar/assimilating it (*osvoenie*) and a comprehensible expression for consciousness. Only later does it attain the level at which it is able to put abstract notions into formulated concepts."[37] Note the choice of verb—*odevaetsia*, meaning literally " is dressed or clothed"—describing the process of taking form. This suggests that it is a form of cloaking and, therefore, of disguise. Here again we see a link between the disguise of essences and mythological thinking.

In Eisenstein's 1935 speech at the All-Union Creative Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinematography, he links myth and allegory, perceived as forms of artistic expression, to the methods of cognition that form the epistemological component of prelogical consciousness:

> Take mythology. We know that at any one stage mythology is, properly speaking, a complex of science of phenomena set out in language

> that is mainly figurative and poetic. All those figures from mythology that we regard as no more than allegory, were at one stage an imagistic summary of our knowledge of the world. Then science moved away from figurative narratives and toward concepts, even though the arsenal of earlier, personified, mythological, and symbolic being continued as a series of stage images, of literary metaphors, lyrical allegories, and so on. They cannot endure in this role, however, and end up in the archives.[38]

MYTH

While the "mythical" in Eisenstein is, then, almost a synonym for "prelogical" and an equivalent of the return to sensual thinking that is necessary for a creation of a work of art, he is aware of the dangers that a simple return to the mythical concepts implies. In the same speech he formulated this as follows: "In addition to this we know also not just momentary, but (temporarily!) irrevocable manifestations of precisely this same psychological regression, when a whole social system is in regress. Then the phenomenon is termed reaction, and the most brilliant light on the question is thrown by the flames of the national-fascist auto-da-fé of books and portraits of unwanted authors in the squares of Berlin."[39]

The importance of the demythification of history against the backdrop of rising Stalinist and Fascist myth-creating activity taking place in Germany at the same time as the making of *¡Que Viva Mexco!* can hardly be underestimated. However, the accusation against Eisenstein's work in the thirties is precisely that he participated in the process of Stalinist myth creation, ignoring his own admonition against psychological regression. The same charge has been made against the muralists (Diego Rivera in particular) who, it is claimed, encased the Mexican Revolution in an ideological myth that legitimated the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), just as it tended towards one party rule and the organized corruption that undermined the progressive programs of the thirties. Here it is again instructive to compare Eisenstein to Benjamin, who was also struggling to distinguish the Fascist use of myth by Hitler from the progressive moment in mythical thinking that he was trying to recover. Many of Benjamin's major influences, such as Ludwig Klages, leaned toward or even embraced Fascism. In a review of a book by one of the leading conservative revolutionaries, Ernst Jünger, Benjamin remarked upon the "bad" use of the cultic to aestheticize the reality of war, which was bound up with a technological system in which "… the increase in technical artifacts, in power sources, and in tempo generally that the private

sector can neither absorb completely nor utilize adequately . . . [Their] vindication can only occur in antithesis to a harmonious balance, in war, and the destructive power of war provides clear evidence that social reality was not ready to make technology its own organ, and that technology was not strong enough to master the elemental forces of society." [40] As had been evident since the "conservative revolutionaries" first gained notice at the end of WWI, Fascism consciously promoted a tendentious irrationality as a contrast to both the positivism of liberal democracy and Communism's anti-hierarchical program. As Richard Wolin has pointed out, a series of Benjamin's essays, beginning with the 1933 essay "On the Mimetic Faculty," which was written immediately after Benjamin fled Hitler's Germany, was connected to Benjamin's reexamination of the mimetic and mythical strains in his work thus far. As the totalitarian response to the economic collapse of the thirties became ever more dominant, progressive thinkers took up the darker side of the mythological consciousness.

Mythic thinking is, of course, antithetical to historical dialectics because it does not leave a possibility of change or of any utopian impulse. The conservative glorification of the mythic, of the rational, while providing a surface opposition to the technocratic instrumentality of capitalism, is really parasitic upon that technological system, disguising its dependency by accepting a positivistic appraisal of myth. This is why Eisenstein criticized Levy-Bruhl and Frazer for their conception of evolutional development as proceeding in a straight line.[41] Thus, dialectically, incorporating the circular mythical mode subverts the myth of linear progress. Susan Buck-Morss's reformulation of Benjamin states: "Because such a radical historical change has never existed before in history, it can only find expression as myth. It follows that, condemned in one configuration, myth is to be redeemed in another."[42] In Benjamin, this "redemption" and the dialectical shift itself are allegorized. This is why baroque, which gave allegory a central role, is so important for Benjamin.

Benjamin's dallying with the mythic in the service of a revolutionary temporality helps us to highlight a similar pattern in Eisenstein's work in the thirties. This is what Eisenstein accomplishes by incorporating the mythological structures in Mexican history in his film, but at the same time turning them around in the service of the new (post)revolutionary Mexico. Eisenstein, too, turns to the baroque in order to create the new and modern—the revolution and the redemption it offers—and to allegorical modes in general. In *¡Que Viva Mexico!* in place of antiquity we have premodern, pre-Columbian Mexico, but this culture is presented as petrified, seen through the images of the stone ruins. In the opening

shots of the "Prologue," the concept of petrification is emphasized by filming the bodies and faces of Mexicans next to pre-Columbian ruins. The dialectical course that will take us from death to life is not achieved until the substantive leap takes place when images collide in the "Epilogue." Here the technique of montage allows us to see the dialectical shift taking place. The libidinal body is the site where the stony mask is burst asunder, and the weight of—the dead weight of—the commodity nexus (petrified/deadened/deprived of aura) is rolled back to reveal the real living human body, not just a skull or a stone face of a god. This is not a natural and inevitable process, however, which is why some of the skull masks reveal behind them not real faces but other skulls. They are different from the others because those masks belong to the figures of the old regime, the regime that is dead already, and consequently they do not possess any potential for radical change: they are "truly dead," with no future, no possibility of resurrection.

Once we understand the skull as an emblem of spirit petrified, of live things decayed and turned into stone, then the whole film can be seen as a series of progressive resurrections of the dead ruins, of skulls coming into life—it is thus that the revolution that overthrows the class system becomes an event in natural history. At a more metaphorical level, this resurrection can also be seen as an attempt to bring back the meaning and the essence of things—a kind of archeology of culture whereby through the construction of images (and montage), history comes back to life from artifacts and mere nature petrified, from the stone gods with human faces next to them to skulls with human faces behind them. Here, again, we can detect this theme best by counterpointing it with the way the skull image in Benjamin locates "the core of the allegorical way of seeing, and the baroque secular exposition of history as the suffering of the world; it is meaningful only in periods of decline."[43]

According to Benjamin, allegory was a "form of expression" imposed on the subject by the conditions of the external world; certain epochs made this expression imperative because of the surrounding world: "In the Middle Ages, the ruins of a conquered pagan antiquity made knowledge of the impermanence of things . . . inescapable, derived from observation, just as several centuries later, at the time of the Thirty Years War, the same knowledge stared European humanity in the face."[44] Here, then, we have two conditions: the first is the presence of a monumental "pagan antiquity." As we have previously mentioned, in the case of Mexico, this was more alive and present than classical antiquity was in Europe in the time of the baroque. The second is the sense of the impermanence of life. This sense of impermanence was never as

striking as it was in the period between the two European wars. For both Benjamin and Eisenstein, and indeed for most intellectuals of the interwar period, there was an irresistible parallel to be made between their own epoch and other periods of mass social disintegration. Yet the Marxist in both thinkers saw social disintegration in terms of the long history of capitalism. The supposed bourgeois stability out of which their own historic situation arose was founded on the unstable base of class conflict and an ever-expanding sphere of commodified relationships—what Benjamin, in a fragment on Baudelaire, named "petrified unrest."[45] In Eisenstein's case, the allegorical representation of death that permeated Mexican culture could not but acquire a historical and political significance in his film. Again, one can counterpose the trajectory of the relation between allegory and history in Benjamin's work, from the *Trauerspiel* dissertation to "On the Concept of History" in 1940. In the *Origins of the Trauerspiel*, Benjamin wrote: "History, in everything it displays that was from the beginning untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, expresses itself in a face—no, in a skull. It articulates as a riddle, the nature not only of human existence pure and simple, but of biological historicity of an individual in this, the figure of its greatest natural decay."[46] In Bainard Cowan's essay, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," he points to a moment in the *Trauerspiel* that binds together allegory and redemptive time over another image of the skull: "A fragment from a Lohenstein Trauerspiel quoted by Benjamin exemplifies the abrupt transformation of this end-point: So werd ich Todten-Kopff ein English Antlitz seyn—thus will I, a death's-head, become an angel's countenance. The continuous line of impoverishment in allegorical action is only in the service of a final replenishment; this final moment, however, is continually deferred to a point beyond life, or beyond history, or beyond prepositional certifiability. The eschatological moment, the motive force, defining allegory, exists in allegory only under the condition of death and doubt, whose grammatical marks are the future tense of the subjunctive mood."[47] But whereas the vanishing point for baroque allegory in the Christian schema is outside history, Benjamin's idea of Marx as "secularizing the idea of messianic time" made this endpoint immanent: it was the dialectical leap within history understood as revolution.

The Aztec temples in the "Prologue" of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* match Benjamin's conception of the historical background from which arises the preeminence of allegory—its messianic message—in the baroque system: "The new religion (Christianity) believed in the mortification of flesh . . . the pantheon of ancient gods became dead figures, standing

arbitrarily for the ideas they had once embodied as living symbols: the deadness of the figures and the abstraction of the concepts are therefore the precondition for the allegorical metamorphosis."[48] Once again, the social, cultural, and economic conditions in the postrevolutionary Mexico Eisenstein's film crew visited, considered in terms of uneven development, mirror the historical situation of the baroque era while also pointing to those conditions that brought about a revolution in Russia and that were congealing into a productivist regime in the Soviet Union of the thirties. If one accepts the idea that the baroque aesthetic was a reaction against a socioeconomic crisis and the emergence of the modern state, the images in Eisenstein's "Epilogue" of the workers at the cement factory Tolteca acquire a different, more subversive, meaning.[49] At the same time, the footage shot in Tolteca can also been seen as actively contributing to the mytholigization of the state and its technological and economic apparatus, which clearly inhibits the radical political effect of the film, seen from the point of view of Eisenstein's theory of attractions.

TOLTECA CEMENT FACTORY

The footage Eisenstein and crew did at the Tolteca Cement Factory was subsequently not included in any of the standard reconstructions of the film. It is completely suppressed from Alexdandrov's version (which is the version most often used in discussions of the film), and only Jay Leyda's preserved footage of the film along with photographs taken on-site preserve this part of the "Prologue." More recently, Oleg Kovalog included some of the images from this section in his idiosyncratic creative reconstruction of the Mexican footage, *Mexican Fantasy*.

Despite the fact that it has largely been overlooked, the Tolteca Cement Factory was not a generic site, chosen merely as a setting for "modern Mexico." Instead, just like the settings for the earlier parts of the film, the site was charged with great historical and cultural significance for the Mexican art and ideology of the 1930s, symbolic of the alliance between art and nationalism, on the one hand, and of the international dimension of Mexican modernity on the other.

Eyeing the market in building materials, the management of Tolteca, the largest cement company in Mexico, plunged the company into the issues surrounding architectural modernism in the late 1920s, becoming one of the strongest supporters of "the international style" in architecture, which happened to use enormous amounts of cement. As Anita Brenner notes in *Your Mexican Holiday*: "Tolteca Cement Factory had

cement to sell and happened to command the services of an indefatigable and sophisticated advertising manager . . . who stormed the town with art contests, magazines, lectures, and all sorts of restless intelligent pro-modern propaganda."[50]

In 1931, the company finished construction of a new cement factory in the Mixcoac district in Mexico City and announced an artistic competition for the best representation of this monumental ultramodern project, requiring that the works be a "revelation in and of the work itself for the spectator of what a factory is as a work of engineering and modern architecture."[51] The winner in each category (painting, drawing, and photography) would receive seven thousand pesos (a large sum for the times). Diego Rivera was among the members of the jury (along with Jean Charlot), and more than three hundred artists, including many of the most important figures of the time, submitted their works to the competition. All the works presented for the competition were exhibited for ten days in December 1931, attracting more than fifty thousand visitors. Manuel Alvarez Bravo won the first prize for photography out of the more than three hundred photographs submitted, with Agustín Jiménez taking second place. The representation of the factory, especially as rendered through photographic medium, was perfectly aligned with the self-image of the Mexican nation in its ultramodern and internationalist aspect (unlike, for example, the murals, with their retro projection of myth) as that image was being formed within the elite Mexican nationalist imagination. This coincided with a shifting from the public space to a private corporation (a path already undertaken by Diego Rivera in Detroit and New York) and a merger between the state and private interests. The pre-Columbian mythology that had figured so grandiosely in the earlier postrevolutionary cultural politics was not jettisoned, however, but refictionalized: it resonated in the company's very name, Tolteca, with its reference to the ancient pre-Columbian civilization, a connotation that was fastened onto by many of the works presented at the competition. In the words of James Oles: "Instead of the contemporary worker, Alvarez Bravo's image—like the corporate name of his patron—alludes to the nation's ancient heritage, to the restored monuments that have become both tourist attractions and nationalist symbols. The word 'Toltec' refers to 'those who are artists' and was a general term used by the Aztecs to describe the civilizations which bloomed in the valley of Mexico before their arrival. Turned into a trademark, the word implied that the corporation was the builder of a new civilization, the heir to the masterful artists of the distant past."[52]

Eisenstein and crew's visit to the factory to shoot its footage for the "Epilogue" was covered in the newspapers, thus participating in the larger project of glorification of the new construction of the nation. The images shot by Tisse there are stylistically similar to most of the photographs that took part in the competition, while at the same time mirroring the images from the film's "Prologue," further reinforcing the pre-Columbian mythological origins mediated through a thoroughly modern and technologically advanced enterprise, thus foreshadowing the recuperation, by the ruling elite, of the very imagery that had been used, earlier, to revolt against it. The composition of the footage is exactly the same as the sequence in the "Prologue"; whereas in the latter, the heads of the people were juxtaposed with the pyramids and other pre-Columbian constructions, in the Tolteca footage, the workers are substituted for the abstract "Indians," and the factory substituted for the Maya ruins. But unlike the "Prologue," here some of the men are looking into the camera, bringing life into images, and emphasizing the virility of these new gods and men.

While Alvarez Bravo's photograph emphasized the pre-Columbian aspirations of the factory (where the wall of the factory is reminiscent of the pyramids),[53] Agustín Jiménez's second-place photographs of the cylindrical storage towers of the factory more directly insert into the Mexican nationalist iconography references to Soviet constructivism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, working within the familiar paradigm of removing objects "from the domain of automatized perception," as Skhlovsky famously wrote in 1917, and showing them as historical, manmade assemblages.[54]

The footage of the Tolteca factory is not the only link between Eisenstein and Agustín Jiménez, who until very recently has been largely overlooked by historians of photography in Mexico. It was Jiménez who took the famous photograph of Eisenstein with a sugar skull, although it rarely gets credited to him. I will return to another aspect of their friendship later in this chapter.

Manifestly, Alexandrov's 1970s reconstruction of the film suppressed the footage of the factory for political reasons: aside from the glorification of a private corporation, these images lead to the problem of Eisenstein's seeming conformity to a certain kind of Stalinist Socialist realism, and to a certain repressive aesthetic. This takes us back to Eisenstein's baroque aesthetics, his use of allegory, his deep sympathy for the mythical mode, all of which could quickly be appropriated for an organicist aesthetic typical of Stalinist Socialist realist style. Iampolskii, for example, has asserted that the allegorical pattern in Eisenstein's work brings him close to idealism and even romanticism.[55] Again, we find it useful

Figure 35. Image from the "Epilogue." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

to counterpose a similar question that arises for Benjamin, whose baroque use of allegory left him vulnerable, as he was aware, to the charge of reverting to the Romantic philosophy of the symbol. As Benjamin is at pains to point out in the *Trauerspiel*, for the Romantics, the symbol is "where the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole."[56] But as Richard Wolin points out, this, for Benjamin, is a false reconciliation, like the petrified unrest of nineteenth-century bourgeois society.

Unlike Benjamin, Eisenstein in his characteristically nonsystematic approach to philosophy comes closer to justifying such an attack. The circular mode itself—seen in the "eternal time" of the "Prologue" ("it could be anytime") and its link to the "Epilogue"—implies mythical time. If history is eternal and circular, it defies that form of historicity which defines itself in terms of progress and that specificity which consists of the "one time only" in favor of the abstraction of eternal recurrence, and hence implies predeterminism and the impossibility of the kind of change by which history can transcend its circular movement (and, hence, destroy the construction of history itself, from the positivist point of view). Yet if Eisenstein's intent is to produce a dialectical leap from the "Prologue" to the "Epilogue," the film can either not be

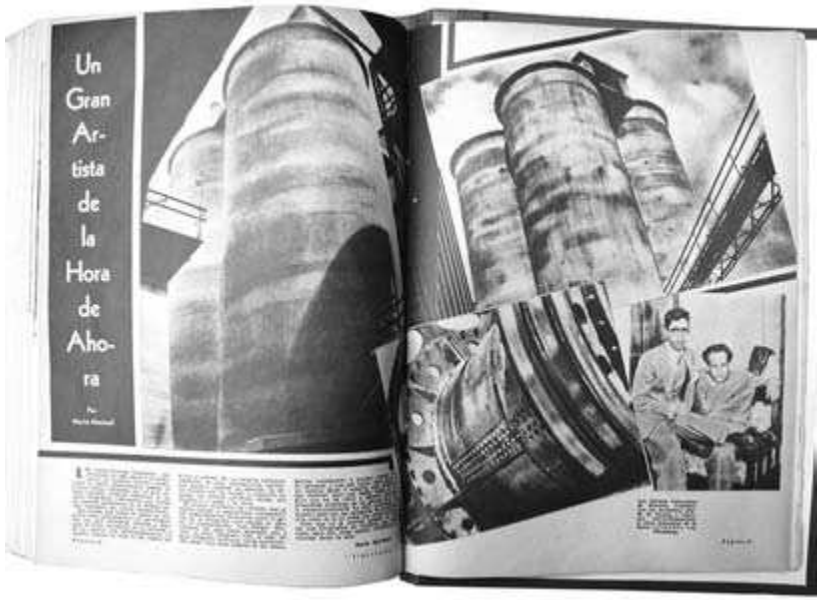

Figure 36. Agustín Jiménez with Sergei Eisenstein. El Universal Ilustrado, December 24, 1931.

read as a circle, or must be judged to have failed to carry out Eisenstein's intention; if a petrified utopia is to give birth to the glorious revolutionary future, the two cannot be read as belonging to the same mode of temporality. Thus, Eisenstein's logic would have us see the film's circular structure as spiral, where the beginning and the end overlap, yet on entirely different planes. The images of death in the "Prologue" are only "ruins," or, to use Benjamin's terminology, "fossils," while the skulls of the "Epilogue" can be seen as allegorical representations of dialectical images. But to judge whether, indeed, the film does succeed in taking us beyond the eternal return of the same, we need to look at Eisenstein's own understanding of dialectics.

EISENSTEIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DIALECTICS

Eisenstein's understanding of the relation between dialectics and mythological (prelogical) structures is worked out in his notes on "The Comic" ("*Komicheskoe*"), which are dated from 1942–44, but whose conception dates back to the early 1930s. The main subject of this essay is none other than Jose Guadalupe Posada and the celebration of the Day of the Dead in Mexico. In these notes, Eisenstein addresses the concept of laughter, which, in a theory that was often referenced in the twenties, Bergson

had located in the mechanization of life. Eisenstein critiques Bergson's vitalism as being merely a polemical tool against positivism, and proposes instead a dialectical model best embodied, according to Eisenstein, in Posada's work. The main drive of this essay lies in the distinction Eisenstein draws between what he calls the formal properties of dialectical thinking, and the "true" dialectical process. This distinction, according to him, illuminates the nature of laughter: "A structure becomes funny when while distorting the dialectics in its essence, in its form it has the pretensions to all the signs and elements of a true dialectical process. The condition for a comic structure is its nondialectical essence accompanied by formal dialectical features."[57] Eisenstein then illustrates this rather tricky distinction through an example of the way that prelogical thinking is related to true dialectical processes. This is where his experience in Mexico is once again accorded central importance, and Posada is used as the main illustration of Eisenstein's dialectics.

Prelogical (or sensuous or primitive) thinking fascinated Eisenstein in the period around the making of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* Moreover, it often seems very difficult to tell whether he is advocating a return to the older forms of perception—the ways of regress, as he himself terms them in his notes to *Method*—and whether this return would be derived first from aesthetic activity, from which it would insinuate itself into the social whole, or whether the method that he tries to formulate is, in fact, something quite different. It is to be noted that we started the discussion of the "Prologue" by considering the consequences of this ambiguity. Having come full circle along with Eisenstein's film via a tour of Mexican history and culture, we are now returning to the same problem. How does one read Eisenstein's "regress" and his insistence on the key importance of prelogical thought as anything but politically and artistically regressive? How can one place this concept, which became so central for Eisenstein, in relation to his insistence on the dialectical nature of his theoretical framework? As a result of this difficulty, Eisenstein scholars have either ignored this later development of his thought, as did most earlier scholars, or insisted on a complete switch, as do David Bordwell and, more recently, Oksana Bulgakowa—a switch from the "dialectical" Eisenstein to the "organic" Eisenstein. However, Eisenstein at the end of his life explained this relationship as follows, referring specifically to his experiences in Mexico:

> It has long been noted that prelogic in the nature of its expression is almost literally identical to dialectical formulations. There is, however, a big difference between a similarity in essence and a

> similarity of the external expression. This similarity is in that this first "period" [of consciousness] is included in the third, while having been "treated" by the second—the logical (or, to be exact, the formally-logistical) period. The difference lies in the role of the second period, which breaks into the concepts of the first one. Thus it becomes possible to discuss the comical also as a system of prelogical ideas in the conditions of postlogical concepts.
>
> Therefore, we have an exact formulation for the historical tomorrow in relation to the definition of the comical as a-logical (our today).[58]

As an example of the identity of the dialectical and the prelogical, Eisenstein presents the phenomenon of laughing at death as it is found in Mexico: "It is precisely in Mexico—the country of unmatched youth, the country where birth and the process of becoming are the main feature of everything Mexican—that laughter at death is represented widely and monumentally."[59]

For Eisenstein, then, Mexico and Mexican culture—its plastic arts, the muralist movement, the pre-Hispanic culture, the popular arts, its baroque heritage, all encapsulated in the celebrations of the Day of the Dead—became emblematic of his understanding of "true dialectical method."[60] It presents for him a model for a (utopian) total synthesis and the overcoming of all class, race, and gender differences. I read this development in Eisenstein as a move from the use of the neobaroque as a political and cultural rejection of modernity (and the positivist view of historical evolution as a "straight line," or a progress)—albeit contained in the modern perceptual experience of cinema of attractions—to its positive use as a recapture of the forms of premodern perception. This "new old" thinking is in turn associated with bisexuality, heterogeneity, and with "the feminine" as a rejection of the rational, consequently severing the traditional association of culture with the male. Eisenstein is far from alone in suggesting this paradigm: around the same time Benjamin challenges the division of male and female in all people, adopting fin-de-siècle themes promoted by Simmel and Weininger in their influential schemas of femininity and bisexuality. To put this differently, around this time, Benjamin was studying the reconstruction of allegory in Baudelaire, and noting the importance of androgyny, lesbianism, homosexuality, and other supposed deviations from the heterosexual norm in the creation of modernism. Again, in Baudelaire, the allegorical describes a moment of immanence in the other—when Benjamin writes that "baroque allegory

only sees the corpse from the outside. Baudelaire sees it also from the inside." Androgyny becomes the emblem of that immanent drift as in Benjamin's comments on androgyny in "The Paris of the Second Empire" in his Baudelaire book.

As Buci-Glucksmann states this:

> It is as if, in crisis periods when the problem of modernity reappeared, it was impossible to approach the "woman question" without considering the "question of civilization" through a whole series of oppositions and myths. In such periods . . . a major effort takes places to deconstruct the frontier between male and female identities, thereby calling into question the pre-urban, natural differences ravaged by the developments of big cities, industrialization and the mass dimension of social phenomena. In the labour of writing, the metaphor of the feminine then rises up as an element in the break with a certain discredited rationality based upon the idea of a historical and symbolic continuum. It does this by designating a new heterogeneity, a new otherness.[61]

In other words, this new otherness rejects the traditional gender divide but ultimately also rejects the existence of a woman; "the feminine" (which more and more begins to designate, in fact, "male in disguise") instead of woman. In his later work, Eisenstein's apparent repression of the structure of difference by means of presenting art as a unified totality results in proliferation of excess—in his writings as well as in his cinematic work. Thus the baroque in Eisenstein functions simultaneously as a rejection of modernity (paradoxically, perhaps, a rejection that is already encoded in the modern experience itself, with the cinema of attraction and Eisenstein's "montage of attractions" both mirroring and constructing that experience) and as a symptom of the eradication of difference, in particular of sexual difference, resulting from this new neobaroque ethos.

With an idiosyncratic form of blindness to the real political tendencies of the time, Eisenstein presents a resolution of the fundamental differences and conflicts that bedevil the modernization project in both the new Mexican state and society and his own postrevolutionary Russia. In a dialectical leap achieved in the "Epilogue" to *¡Que Viva Mexico!* he claims to have resolved the conflicts between "the old and the new," between the economically predominant agricultural sector and the state agenda of favoring industrialization, and between an identity politics rooted in traditional lifestyles (religious, ethnic) and the ideology of the modern state.

Figure 37. Sergei Eisenstein and Eduard Tisse shooting the September National Parade on Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City, September 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Figure 38. Sergei Eisenstein and Eduard Tisse shooting the September National Parade on Paseo de la Reforma, Mexico City, September 1931. Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

In a similar leap, allegedly, he transcended gender differences, rendering them unimportant through the radical synthesis of a revolutionary breakthrough. As often occurs in such utopian scenarios, this unity proves to be primarily coded as male, and the erasure of sexual difference resulted in the erasure of women. Thus in the "Epilogue," women are presented either traditionally as, for example, the woman dancing in front of the Ferris wheel, or are absent.

What adds particular interest to that famous footage of dancing with the skulls, so filled with *jouissance* and libidinal energy, is that the actors we see are actual actors from the cabarets of Mexico City, which Eisenstein frequented along with Best Maugard, Montenegro, Salvador Novo, and others. We know from Eisenstein's correspondence that these cabarets and nightclubs were among the most amazing discoveries he made in Mexico, more outrageous and subversively obscene than anything he had seen in Paris or Berlin (which is quite a telling claim, as the Weimar-period Berlin cabaret scene was famous for its subversion of gender roles and defiance of sexual taboos). Agustín Jiménez, whose aesthetic sensibility corresponded to Eisenstein's own (Eisenstein had contributed a statement of support, in 1931, to Jiménez's first one-man show at *Galeria Moderna*), published a series of photo essays on the nightlife culture of Mexico City in the newspaper *Revista de Revistas* in February of 1932. The same year, Jiménez started a new publication, *Molino Verde*, whose title was taken from the name of an infamous cabaret in the Santa Maria la Redonda quarter of Mexico City. The photographs published in it brought together Jiménez's constructivist aesthetic and a Busby-Berkeley style geometrical representation of seminaked women's bodies.[62] Given Eisenstein's enthusiasm for Maria la Redonda cabarets and Agustín Jiménez's photography, it is even more surprising that the footage in front of the Ferris wheel, while including some women, is not particularly focused on the women's bodies but rather on the men's.

While it may be understandable that there are no women in the Tolteca factory footage (although, in fact, there were a growing number of working women in Mexico, and a robust feminist working-class movement[63]), the few women who appear in the "Epilogue" are not given much visual emphasis, not even in a way that could prefigure Jiménez's artistic career following his encounter with Eisenstein, which would be much informed by it.[64] Most importantly, in the very last shots of the "Epilogue," after the death masks are taken off, the scene that represents the future of Mexico shows no women or girls.

Figure 39. Image from the "Epilogue." Courtesy Mexican Picture Partnership.

FRIDA KAHLO'S *GIRL WITH DEATH MASK*

A perfect counterpoint to these images from the "Epilogue" is a painting by Frida Kahlo done seven years later, one of her minor and lesser-known works entitled *Girl with Death Mask* (1938). In it we see an isolated image of a little Mexican girl wearing a mask exactly like the masks from the Day of the Dead, with a similar mask placed on the ground next to her. She is surrounded by a harsh and deserted landscape, and the combination of the infantile tenderness of her little body, the delicacy of her frilly dress—which is either festive or perhaps just a nightgown—and the helplessness and uncertainty of her clasping a flower with both hands are in sharp and uncanny contrast to the solid lifelessness of the mask she is wearing. The sky in the background is very similar to the sky in the execution sequence of Eisenstein's "Fiesta." The painting achieves the same remarkable crossing and blurring of the various boundaries as Eisenstein's images—between life and death, between the human and the nonhuman. The death mask, central to the painting, serves a variety of functions similar to those in Eisenstein. It is a reference to baroque allegory whereby all, the young and the old, the rich and the poor (the girl in the painting, like Kahlo herself, is coded through her dress as decidedly middle class) are equal in the face of death. The painting ironically reverses conventions: the skull is also a sign of non-Western cultural otherness, functioning similarly and possibly in reference to the African

Figure 40. Frida Kahlo, Girl with Death Mask, 1938. © 2008 Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust. Av. Cinco de Mayo No. 2, Col. Centro, Del. Cuauhtémoc 06059, México, D.F.

masks in Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). Unlike Picasso's painting, where the masks serve as markers of a radically different culture, of strangeness and otherness, here the mask is rendered as mere cultural commonplace in Kahlo's own environment, through the reference to the tradition of the Day of the Dead in Mexico.[65] This painting is also,

ultimately, very autobiographical, as all of Kahlo's paintings tend to be. Just as Eisenstein famously claimed that he does not create cinema, he creates Mexico and himself ("Je ne fais du cinema, je fais du Mexique et moi!"), and in line with his claim that he saw in Mexico an externalization of his internal states and interests, Kahlo's little girl with a death mask is an externalization of her own world, but a very conscious and intentional one. Thus the two masks are also references to the various pre-Columbian artifacts that Kahlo was ardently collecting, and of the "mask" of indigenousness that she created for herself through her elaborate Tehuana costumes (exactly like the ones worn by the women in the "Sandunga" episode of *¡Que Viva Mexico!*) and reinforced in her many self-portraits. Much like Eisenstein, Frida Kahlo was no stranger to the metaphors of autovivisection, autopsy, (self-)mutilation, and sadomasochism, which were all intended for a subversive radical effect. She was not only an active member of the Mexican Communist Party, but an avid reader and an ardent follower of the "true dialectics" and, like Eisenstein, in her copious diaries and letters applied the term to the analysis of her personal life and relationships with Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky.[66] Largely due to her closeness to the surrealists, the visceral affective and aesthetic shock her paintings are intended to produce in the viewer is not entirely unlike the shock of Eisenstein's "montage of attractions." Finally, her own bisexuality and obsession with reproduction and motherhood make these issues as much of a common theme for Kahlo's work as they are for Eisenstein. But in radical contrast to Eisenstein, sexual difference for Kahlo is simply not resolvable, and is utterly unsynthesizable, even in the face of death, as is evident in the painting of *Girl with Death Mask*. It is precisely the difference, and not the synthesis and the absolution of the differences, that creates the stark and shocking effect of this work. The boundaries and differences are blurred and crossed, shown to be culturally and personally unstable and relative, and yet persistently refuse to be resolved. Similarly, the commodification and objectification looming behind the death mask, which turns human into nonhuman, and the violence that turns people into objects and things that is also behind the imagery of the Day of the Dead as interpreted in Posada's work, is present with even more terrifying force in Kahlo's painting. Behind the theatrical performativity, aesthetisization, and even, arguably, religious ecstasy of Kahlo's mutilation (very real for her, of course, and not merely a metaphor or symbol) is real pain, both physical and emotional. The extrasemantic quality of death and violence are acknowledged. The dead fetus, which Eisenstein so lovingly holds in his palm in the famous photograph from Zurich taken in 1930, and

which he kept as a "souvenir" in his Moscow apartment, for Kahlo was not a mere object of abstract curiosity and theoretical interest: because of her severe injuries, Frida Kahlo suffered a series of miscarriages, most notably in 1932 on her trip to the U.S.[67] She did a series of paintings on this subject, the most famous of which, *Henry Ford Hospital or The Flying Bed* (1932), depicts an aborted fetus still linked to Kahlo's umbilical cord as she lies in bed, helpless and bleeding. This motif became recurrent in Kahlo's work for the rest of her life.

Instead of the utopian unity of Eisenstein's men in the "Epilogue," Kahlo's girl is alone and completely isolated. As read (anachronistically) through Frida's work, the images of workers in the Tolteca factory from Eisenstein's "Epilogue" also appear more morbid and evil bearing, their forced smiles reminiscent of death skulls. But even the ultimate disaster that prevented Eisenstein from ever completing the picture, the years of depression following his return to the Soviet Union, and the terrifying reality of life under Stalin (and, for that matter, a rapid turn to the right in Mexico, which Eisenstein must have been aware of on some level) did not make the Soviet director any less of a believer in the utopian potential, embodied in the images of Mexico that he captured on film. He returned to them over and over during the last years of his life. His mother's death on August 14, 1946, inspired Eisenstein to write perhaps his most extended passage about Mexico, many parts of which have been quoted throughout this work. After another detailed description of the celebration of the Day of the Dead, Eisenstein finished the essay with the following sentence, where the pain of loss is not truly overcome by hope, and in which the metaphors of motherhood, perhaps for the only time in his oeuvre, resonate with pain:

> The Day of the Dead is being circulated as a short, having no idea of its goal as crowning the tragic and ironic finale of a big poem of Life, Death, and Immortality, which has chosen Mexico in its conception, and which never was realized on the screen.
>
> Let us use irony again to overcome this case of death—the death of one's own progeny, who had been invested with so much love, labor, and inspiration.[68]

CODA: IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

The choice to end this manuscript with addressing in a very direct manner the issue of sexual difference was justified for me not only textually (through the images from Eisenstein's film and Frida Kahlo's painting), but historically as well as methodologically. Many works of art from the

1920s and 1930s that were produced at a time of social movement and radical change for women betray an anxiety regarding female subjectivity. The absence of any modern "new women" from *¡Que Viva Mexico!* and instead the insistence on the most essentialist representation of women betrays that anxiety.

At the same time, this anxiety needs to be understood as essentially modern—and modernist. I contend that the inability of some critics to recognize the modern in Eisenstein's later work is a measure of the ideological dominance of constructivism over our retrospective frame of reference for modernism in general and the avant-garde in particular. This dominance filters out the strong organicist tendency that inheres in modernism from the beginning, failing to connect an international style to the global influence of ethnography on twenties modernism, to which Eisenstein was strongly attuned. It is here that the modernist reconception of the baroque gains its centrality, functioning, in Eisenstein's case, to reconcile his revolutionary sympathies, so often an excuse to obliterate traditional societies, to the primitive by imagining a model of history outside of that of "progress" over time. Thus, when Eisenstein, in the "Prologue" to *¡Que Viva Mexico!* juxtaposed the primitive and the advanced, he was taking the logic of modernism to its furthest extreme, and in doing so he aligned himself with other of the great modernist projects of the decade, whether politically on the right or the left. The great monuments of twenties modernism (Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book, the Mexican muralist program, the cultural relativism promoted by students of Boas like Margaret Mead in *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), to name just a few) are all extraterritorial endeavors unleashed by the attempt to get outside of the positivist program of progress—which had so evidently led to the catastrophes of war and immiseration—and to collapse its masculinist, productionist, Eurocentric norms. It is within this model that some of the key tensions of the modern(ist) age reveal themselves with particular force—those of the simultaneous desire for and the impossibility of a stable identity, sexual or national.

I understand *¡Que Viva Mexico!* then, also as an attempt to reconstitute and imagine the whole of a nation over its various ruptures (historical and epistemological) and fragmentations. I see the film as an effort to cover for and "imagine over the lack: of the essential origins of the nation." As is often the case, it is easier to imagine such a totality from a distance, whether geographic (from a different continent) or cultural (addressing a different nation), by looking at a foreign phenomenon through a fetishistic gaze. The classically Freudian fetishistic gaze

attempts to comfort, papering over the traumatic apprehension of female lack with the erotic plentitude of a substitute object. With this perspective we can read the film itself as a fetish covering the lack of an object of a nation—Russia in the disguise of Mexico—against the reality of modernization and cosmopolitanism and the impossibility of determining national origins as such: the longing for a homeland that is not there, further underlined by Eisenstein's own background, a German Jew from Riga. This longing can be seen as his "sublime object of ideology" and the embodiment of a structural lack of national desire.[69] The representation of the Mexican nation that we see in *¡Que Viva Mexico!* is typical in many respects: it is either constituted through the fetishization of the indigenous (a utopia of origins purporting to offer authenticity), or the baroque excess of Spanish culture, or, in fact, both at the same time. The painful impossibility of Eisenstein's confining his own identity in terms of either nationality or sexual orientation and ways to cover for this lack (fetishistically, through excess) are mirrored in his attempts to depict and talk about Mexico.[70] This further explains the famous quote from his notes—"je ne fais du cinema; je fait du Mexique et moi"—and the constant references to Mexico in his writings as an externalization of Eisenstein's own internal world: Mexico is inseparable from Eisenstein, it IS Eisenstein. Any attempt to define one's own subjective identity, however, turns out to be as elusive as attempts to define the nation. These are the struggles Eisenstein deals with in the film and in his thinking about the film; this is why the loss of it became such a traumatic experience in his life.

The concept of fetish, as well as Eisenstein's employment of figures of motherhood in relation to the film, are thus more than mere metaphors. Both in his films and in his theoretical writings, Eisenstein's manner of dealing with the trauma of sexual difference (to which castration anxiety is a direct reference) results in his pronouncement of bi-sex and plasmic origins in his theories, and in homoeroticism and baroque excess on the screen. The underlying anxiety over the incomprehensibility of gender as such leaves performativity as the only way to both conceptualize and represent gender, as seen in his writing on the exchange of clothes in primitive rituals. The alternative appears to be, in the absence of gender as an essential category, the absence of woman as anything more than a figure or a metaphor, as all of the chapters of this book have explored and demonstrated.

In spite of these critiques, it is important to emphasize how radical Eisenstein's work is when placed in the context of the Soviet ideological climate—as well as the Mexican one, for that matter. Even if his

aspirations ultimately failed, if they remained unrealized on the screen and led to possibly dramatically flawed conclusions in his theoretical work, the tremendous radical ambition and the high stakes in the making of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* make it a particularly rewarding subject, one that suggests numerous possibilities for further exploration.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. In 1950, Kenneth Anger also used footage from Eisenstein's film.
2. The story of the making of the film is documented in Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman, eds., *The Making and Unmaking of "¡Que Viva México!"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).
3. See Naum Kleiman, "Problema Eizenshteina," in *Metod*, by Sergei Eizenshtein (Moskva: Muzei kino, 2002), 1:5–30. Hereafter referred to as *Metod*.
4. Raymond Bellour, *The Analysis of Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 4.
5. Inga Karetnikova and Leon Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).
6. See Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," in *The Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 413; Peter Wollen, "Eisenstein: Cinema and the Avant Garde," *Art International* 12, no. 9 (November 1968), and "Art in Revolution," *Studio International* (April 1971).
7. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 6.
8. For a comprehensive recent account of scholarship on cinema and modernity, see Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5–22.
9. See Miriam Hansen, "Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no.2 (1999); Yuri Tsivian, "Between the Old and the New: Soviet Film Culture in 1918–1924," *Griffithiana* 55/56 (1996): 15–63, quoted in Zhen, *An Amorous History*, 4; and Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000).
10. Zhen, *An Amorous History*, 3.
11. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
12. This explicit political dimension of cinematic modernism is discussed by, among others, Perry Anderson and T. J. Clark. See Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," *New Left Review* 144 (March–April 1984): 96–113; and T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, introduction.
13. See Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving*

Image (London: Reaktion Books, 2006); Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's PhotoSynthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Garrett Stewart, *Framed Cinema: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

14. Stewart, *Framed Cinema*, 3.
15. Ibid., 128.
16. Oksana Bulgakowa, "The Evolving Eisenstein," in *Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration*, ed. Al LaValley and Barry P. Scherr (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); and Oksana Bulgakowa, *Sergei Eisenstein: A Biography* (Berlin: Potemkin Press, 2001).
17. Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctures: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003).
18. David Bordwell, "Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift," *Screen* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1974/75): 29–46; and David Bordwell, "Eisenstein's Epistemology: A Response," *Screen* 16 (Spring 1975): 142–43.
19. David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 195.
20. In addition to the already cited works by Bordwell and Bulgakowa, see François Albera, "Eisenstein and the Theory of the Photogram," in *Eisenstein Rediscovered*, ed. Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (London: Routledge, 1993); François Albera, *Eisenstein et le constructivisme russe: Dramaturgie de la forme* (Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1990); Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*," *October* 2 (1976): 27–38; and Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Ulysses*: Montage and the Claims of Subjectivity," *Art & Text* 34 (1989): 64–78.
21. See in particular Mikhail Iampolskii, "Eizenshteinvskii sintez," in *Uskol'zaiushchii kontekst: Russkaia filosofiia v postsovetskikh usloviiakh* (Moskva: Ad Marginem, 2002), 77–105; "'Organicheskaia mashina' u Eizenshteina i Disneiia," *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 34 (1997); and *Sublimatsiya kak formoobrazovanie*, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 43 (1999).
22. *Metod* 1:17, and elsewhere in the volume.
23. *Metod* 2:399, and elsewhere in the volume.
24. "Ways of Regress" was the title of a chapter intended for *Metod*, written between 1934 and 1943.
25. Iampolskii addresses this tendency in Eisenstein in Mikhail Iampolskii, "*Sublimatsiya kak formoobrazovanie*."
26. Kristin Thompson uses *Ivan the Terrible* as an illustration of the concept of cinematic excess in chapter 9 of her book *Eisenstein's "Ivan the Terrible": A Neoformalist Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
27. Joan Neuberger, *Ivan the Terrible* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 95.
28. Yuri Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible* (London: BFI Publishing, 2002), 71.
29. The missing component of this story in the present work is, of course, Europe. Ideally the story should include the surrealists as well as the German Dadaists at the very least, but those stories, although they still remain to be told in the context of the present study, are better known, and it is the margins of this movement that are the center of this investigation. Curiously enough, these

very moments in cultural history—the Soviet avant-garde, the Mexican Renaissance, the cultural left in the U.S., surrealism and Dadaism—became pivotal for the scholars and artists in the late 1960s and 1970s, and they turned to them for hidden clues and promises, and found them charged with meaning that is yet to be resurrected. But that is an entirely different story. In my work, however, I am often influenced and guided by these scholars and thinkers, although from a more critical later perspective, in an attempt to historicize and question their reading of the 1920s.

30. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1982), reprinted in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 82.
31. As expressed in Russia by Alexander Shevchenko, one of the members of the Donkey Tail group that paved the way for many figures of Russian futurism as early as 1913: "Primitives, icons, lubki, trays, signboards, fabrics of the Orient . . . these are the models of real value and of beauty. . . . This initiation of the Orient is an inner and spiritual one. . . . Neo-primitivism is a profoundly national phenomenon." Alexander Shevchenko, "Neo-primitivism: Its Theory, Its Potentials, Its Achievements," in *Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 107.
32. As, once again, Shevchenko claims: "Asia has given us all the depth of its culture, its primitive nature, and Europe in its turn added some traits of its own civilization. Thus neoprimitivism is born of the fusion of Oriental traditions and the forms of the Occident." Ibid.
33. Carlos Monsivais, foreword to *Anita Brenner: A Mind of Her Own*, by Susannah Joel Glusker (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), x.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Sergei Eizenshtein, *Memuary*, ed. Naum Kleiman (Moskva: "Trud" and Muzei kino, 1997), 2:345–46. Quoted in in Karetnikova and Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, 166.
2. Olivier Debroise, "Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein: México y yo." Unpublished manuscript.
3. The other two parts of the film were dedicated to the muralist and art critic Jean Charlot, and to Jose Guadalupe Posada, whose prints inspired and informed the muralist project.
4. A movement in Mexico, seeking to advance Indian cultural values.
5. José Antonio Aguilar Rivera, *The Shadow of Ulysses: Public Intellectual Exchange Across the U.S.-Mexico Border* (New York: Lexington Books, 2000), 4.
6. George Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 232.
7. Though not a political radical, Vasconcelos to a great extent modeled himself on the first commissar of the enlightenment of the first Soviet government, Anatoly Lunacharsky, particularly because he shared Lunacharky's emphasis on the importance of education to postrevolutionary state formation.

See John Ochoa, "Jose Vasconcelos' Exemplary Failures" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1993).

8. Olivier Debroise, *Figuras en el trópico: Plástica Mexicana 1920–1940* (Barcelona: Océano, 1985), 68.
9. Genaro Fernandez Macgregor, ed., *Antologia de Jose Vasconcelos* (México: Ediciones Oasis, 1968), 33.
10. See Alicia Azuela de la Cueva, *Arte y Poder: Renacimiento artistico y revolucion social. Mexico 1910–1945* (México: El Colegio de Michoacan, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2005), 121.
11. Ibid., 97–99.
12. Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson and Clark, 1929; repr., New York: Dover, 2002).
13. Carlos García Mora, ed., *La antropologia en Mexico: Panorama historica, la antropología en México. Panorama histórico* (México, DF: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1987), 115.
14. I thank Olivier Debroise for urging me to pay closer attention to the difference between these two ideological programs in relation to Eisenstein.
15. Olivier Debroise, "La invencion del arte mexicano (1906–1940)." Unpublished manuscript, 30–55.
16. Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, *Del muro a la pantalla: S. M. Eisenstein y el arte pictórico mexicano* (México: Universidad de Guadalajara, Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura y Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía, 1997), 19.
17. Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 63.
18. It is hard not to notice the resonance of this title with the title of Eisenstein's last collection of essays.
19. Adolfo Best Maugard, *Método de dibujo: Tradición, resurgimiento y evolución del arte mexicano* (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1923), 13.
20. Ibid., 9.
21. Azuela de la Cueva, *Arte y Poder*, 99.
22. Miguel Covarrubias, his drawings, his ethnographic work on ancient Mexico, and especially his book on the life and customs of Bali also influenced Eisenstein, who mentions them frequently in his writings of the 1940s.
23. Best Maugard, *Método de dibujo*, 14.
24. Quoted in Vega Alfaro, *Del muro a la pantalla*, 20.
25. Quoted in ibid., 21.
26. Quoted in Geduld and Gottesman, The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva México!" 43.
27. James Goodwin, Eisenstein, Cinema, and History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 135.
28. Quoted in Charles Roberts Aldrich, *The Primitive Mind and Modern Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 78.
29. Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars*, 38.
30. The early foundations of this interest can be traced to discussions with Eisenstein's friends among the prominent Soviet philosophers and scientists, including Vygotsky, Marr, and Luria as early as the 1920s. A. R. Luria in

particular did research on orally based cultures and thought in 1930–31, and he reformulated Levy-Bruhl's concept of "prelogical" thinking based on field research in Uzbekistan and Kirghizia. See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London: Routledge, 1982), 49–57.

31. "Dvizhenie myshleniia," in *Metod* 1:91.
32. Translation in Goodwin, Eisenstein, Cinema, and History, 129.
33. Bulgakowa, "The Evolving Eisenstein," 44.
34. Mikhail Iampolskii, "The Essential Bone Structure: Mimesis in Eisenstein," in *Eisenstein Rediscovered: Soviet Cinema of the '20s and '30s*, ed. Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (London: Routledge, 1993), 185.
35. Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*, 123.
36. Quoted in Karetnikova and Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, 39.
37. See Susannah Joel Glusker, *Anita Brenner: A Mind of Her Own* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Carlos Monsivais, ed., *Anita Brenner: Vision of an Age* (Mexico: Editorial PK, 2007).
38. Frances Toor, "Mexican Folkways," *Mexican Folkways* 7, no. 4 (October–December 1932): 205–11.
39. For an analysis of this subject, see, for example, Alicia Azuela de la Cueva, "Idols Behind Altars: Cornerstone of the Mexican Artistic Renaissance," *Monsivais* (2007): 154–61.
40. Rostislav Iurenev, ed., *Eizenshtein v vospominaniiah sovremennikov* (Moskva: Isskusstvo, 1982), 74.
41. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 185.
42. Lewis Spence, *Myths of Mexico and Peru* (New York: Dover, 1995), 104–18.
43. Walter Krickeberg, *Mitos y leyendas de los aztecas, incas, mayas y mexicas* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980), 220–21.
44. Félix Báez-Jorge, *La Afrodita Barbuda: Literatura y plástica en la perspectiva antropológica* (México: Fondas Nuevas, 1998), 168.
45. Neumann, *The Great Mother*, 191.
46. Báez-Jorge, *La Afrodita Barbuda*, 156.
47. Ibid., 156–58.
48. The original script of *Bezhin Lug* did not begin with the mother's death; this scene did not appear until page 20, and it was Eisenstein who immediately made a decision to restructure the plot. See Rastislav Iureniev, *Eizenshtein: Zamysly. Fil'my. Metod*., vol. 2, *1930–1948* (Moskva: Isskustvo, 1985), 95–96.
49. Olivier Debroise, "Vertical Screen," in *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramirez and Hector Olea (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
50. The essay was later reprinted in Raquel Tibol, *David Alfaro Siqueiros: Un mexicano y su obra* (México, DF: Empresas Editoriales, 1969), 101.
51. Seymour Stern, "Supplementary Data on Eisenstein" (unpublished manuscript, BFI Archives, Marie Seton papers, 1950) quoted in Olivier Debroise, "Vertical Screen," 244.
52. Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible*, 43.

1. Quoted in Geduld and Gottesman, *The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva México!"* 53.
2. Quoted in *Metod* 1:25.
3. Letter to Amalgamated Bank of New York, quoted in Geduld and Gottesman, *The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva México!"* 117.
4. In fact, Eisenstein met Flaherty in Hollywood in 1929. Flaherty, who had been planning on making a film in Mexico himself, allegedly was one of the first people to suggest to Eisenstein the idea for *¡Que Viva Mexico!*
5. Joanne Hershfield, "Paradise Regained: Sergei Eisenstein's *¡Que Viva Mexico!* as Ethnography," in *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Barry Keith Grant and Jeanette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 55–69.
6. Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance*, 143.
7. Debroise, *Figuras en el trópico*, 39–40.
8. See Debroise, *Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein*.
9. George Mosse, "Comment" in *Historic Preservation Today*, 38–42, quoted in Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 77.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Letter from Eisenstein to Ivor Montagu, February 2, 1931, Tehuantepec. BFI Archives, Ivor Montagu Collection.
13. *Nuestro Mexico*, Marzo de 1932, 1, "Eisenstein en Mexico."
14. Letter from Eduard Tisse to Montagu, March 17, 1931, Mexico City. BFI Archives, Ivor Montagu collection.
15. See Marie Seton, *Sergei Eisenstein: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).
16. Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 187.
17. Ibid., 73–74.
18. For a detailed exploration of the intersection of these two concepts, see Laura Mulvey, introduction to *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996).
19. See, for example, Anne Nesbet's account of Eisenstein's fascination with fetuses in *Savage Junctures*, 140–43.
20. *Metod* 2:397.
21. Ibid., 541.
22. Ibid., 554.
23. Ibid., 562.
24. Ibid., 563.
25. Ibid., 564.
26. In distinguishing between "woman" and "women," I follow Teresa de Lauretis's formulation in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5–6.

27. We will return to this observation in great detail in the analysis of the "Epilogue"—the Day of the Dead—in ¡Que Viva Mexico!
28. *Metod* 2:562.
29. This notion must have resonated strongly with Hertzen's ideas of the peasant as the protosocialist, and the late-nineteenth-century tradition of "khozhdenie v narod."
30. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1949), 144.
31. Ibid., 143.
32. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 82.
33. Ibid., 83.
34. Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution."
35. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 96.
36. Sergei Eisenstein, *Immoral Memories: An Autobiography*, trans. Herbert Marshall (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1983), 260.
37. Joseph Freeman's article from the Hoover Institute Archive, Joseph Freeman's file, quoted in Debroise, "Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein," 65.
38. Laura Podalsky, "Patterns of the Primitive: Sergei Eistenstein's *¡Que Viva Mexico!*" in *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, ed. John King, Ana López, and Manuel Alvarado (London: BFI Publishing, 1993), 33.
39. Morris Helprin, *Close Up*, reprinted from *Experimental Cinema* (February 1933), 144.
40. For a thorough exploration of this topic, see Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
41. A good example of this would be the attacks on Salvador Novo (who would become another friend of Eisenstein's) by the estredentistas—an avant-garde group in Mexico that was influenced by the Soviet futurists and Mayakovsky in particular—and their polemics on revolutionary virility as opposed to "decadent" homosexuality.
42. Tina Modotti, *Una mujer sin pais: Las cartas a Edward Weston y otros papeles personales*, ed. Antonio Saborit (Mexico: Cal y arena, 1992), 185.
43. The only historical evidence of this comes from the accounts of Xavier Guerrero's daughter, who accompanied Modotti on her visits to the Soviet Embassy, and through memoirs of Modotti's lover, the notorious Soviet spy Vittorio Vidali. See Pino Cacucci, *Tina Modotti: A Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 169–70.
44. See Kathleen Morgan Drowne and Patrick Huber, *The 1920s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 278.
45. While this reference to film noir is somewhat anachronistic, I would argue that the link between urbanism and the emergence of the "new woman" is very much part of the genealogy of the "femme fatale" iconography, as is the destroying-woman archetype of the 1890s, the Salome type. This is where film women like Pabst's Lulu, or Marlene Dietrich as Lola in *The Blue Angel*,

came from—preceding the Hollywood film-noir femmes fatales—a genealogy further supported by the fact that so many of the Hollywood directors of that era were European refugees.

46. Robert Belton explores this phenomenon as applied to the representation of women in male surrealism in his book *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Women in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995).
47. Nesbet, *Savage Junctures*, 123–26.
48. Courtesy Olivier Debroise.
49. See commentaries to the Russian translation of this essay in Eizenshtein, *Memuary* 2, 487–88; and Brenner and Eisenstein's correspondence, Hoover Institute.
50. Tetrad' no. 1131, RGALI.
51. "Prometei," in *Memuary* 2, 343.
52. Quoted in Karetnikova and Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, 165.
53. Ibid., 345.
54. Annette Michelson's "A World Embodied in the Dancing Line," *October* 96 (Spring 2001): 3, connects the ecstatic with the drawings Eisenstein made in Mexico, but also with the rejection of Diego Rivera's line.
55. Sergei Eisenstein, "How I Learnt to Draw," in *Volume IV: Beyond the Stars*, ed. Richard Taylor, trans. William Powell (London: BFI, 1995), 578.
56. Ibid.
57. For a detailed analysis of Eisenstein's erotic drawings from Mexico in their cultural context, see Olivier Debroise, "Una incommunicabile delicidad: Los debujos eroticos de Sergei Eisenstein," *XXIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte: El amor y el desamor en las arte* (Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 2000), and Mikhail Iampolskii's writings.
58. I will reserve my comments on the ideological implication of this assigning of femininity to Rivera (a clear instance of how the figure of woman is of the greatest importance in Eisenstein's discourse—both theoretical and artistic—at the time) for a later time.
59. Letter from Kimbrough to Sinclair, February 15, 1931, Tehuantepec. Quoted in Geduld and Gottesman, *The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva México!"* 53.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Quoted in Geduld and Gottesman, *The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva México!"*
2. *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* 36/37 (1997–98): 235.
3. From the memorandum to the Mexican authorities from August 27, 1931 (Sinclair Archive, University of Indiana):

   Third Story.

   > Made on Hacienda Tetlapayac, in the State of Hidalgo. This story, which we will call "Maguey" will show conflict between peons and haciendados before the revolution. In a conflict between these two groups a number of persons from each group are killed by being shot or ridden over by

horses. Here the revolutionary idea was born, a protest again the tyranny that had been developing until the revolution took place.

Fourth Story.

Called "Spanish Miracle," this story will show the Spanish influence, both social and religious, in Mexico. It will consist mainly of a bullfighter's romance, in the course of which the classical phase of the art of bullfighting will be represented. The background will consist of religious ceremonies, scenes of religious processions in which pilgrims climb on their knees to a shrine above, or walk with cactus bound across their arms to represent a cross. It will show the scenes of symbolical Indian dances, colonial architecture, and other beautiful features of Spanish-Mexican life.

4. Robert Harbison, *Reflections on Baroque* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 167.
5. *Metod* 1:242, translated in Karetnikova and Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, 155.
6. See José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
7. Gregg Lambert, *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (London: Continuum Press, 2004), 9.
8. *Metod* 1:234.
9. Victor Shklovsky, "O spetsifike khudozhestvennykh sredstv kino" (Experimental Workshop lecture, January 17, 1929), quoted in Nikita Lary, "Viktor Shklovsky: The Good and Awkward Friend," in LaValley and Scherr, *Eisenstein at 100*, 128.
10. *Metod* 2:242.
11. See Lambert, *Return of the Baroque*, 29.
12. Ibid., 33.
13. Tom Gunning (paper delivered at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY, November 2006).
14. On the discourse on the haptic in relation to early cinema, see Antonia Lant, "Haptic Cinema," *October* 74 (Fall 1995): 45–73; Noel Burch, "Building a Haptic Space," in *Life to Those Shadows* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 162–85.
15. Quoted in Lary, "Viktor Shklovsky," 124.
16. Letters to Maxim Strauch and Ilya Trauberg, May 8–10, 1931, Tetlapayac, *October* 14 (1980).
17. Letter from Eisenstein to Montague, February 2, 1931, Tehuantepec. BFI Archives, Ivor Montagu Collection.
18. *Eisenstein en Mexico: El circulo eterno* (Canal 22, 1993).
19. Bulgakowa, "The Evolving Eisenstein," 42.
20. See "The Montage of Attractions" (1923) and "The Montage of Film Attractions" (1924) in Sergei Eizenshtein, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1964–71), 1:133–59.
21. Geduld and Gottesman, *The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva México!"* 188.

22. It is possible that the scene of the bullfight was influenced by D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*, which begins with a bullfight and pays particular attention to the differences in class structure in the audience (although with an anti–working class stance).
23. See, for example, "Puti Regressa" in *Metod* 1:205–15.
24. *Metod* 1:47.
25. Ibid., 246–47.
26. Letters to Strauch and Trauberg, May 8–10, 1931, Tetlapayac, *October* 14 (1980).
27. In his later writings Eisenstein uses an animal metaphor—that of a kangaroo springing out of another kangaroo—to signify the transformation of matter, the process of becoming. This hybridity, of course, is something that becomes fundamental for any discussion of Latin American (and specifically Mexican) cultures. In the case of Mexico, for example, a famous Mexican contemporary cultural commentator, Roger Bartra, uses another biological metaphor in describing the fictional construction of national identity. In what he calls "amphibian myths," Bartra uses the image of the axolotl, a Mexican salamander, to represent Mexican cultural and national identity as neither fully modern nor fully "primitive," but a hybrid—half urban, half agrarian, half indio, half pelado (the poor working peon). I thank Vilashini Cooppan for bringing this to my attention.
28. This construction is spatial, rather than primarily temporal, as is the case with *October*, according to Ropars's argument. At the same time, the spatiality of the settings of the two episodes implies well-defined temporal categories, one pre- and the other postconquest; first the premodern scene inscribed in a space of Christian mythology, then a scene of a Catholic ritual within a space of Aztec civilization.
29. Seton, *Sergei Eisenstein*, 199.
30. *Metod* 1:233–34.
31. Letter dated July 4, 1931, translated in Jay Leyda, ed., *Eisenstein 2: A Premature Celebration of Eisenstein's Centenary* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1985), 48.
32. Letter from Jean Charlot to Marie Seton, April 1, 1950. BFI Archives, Marie Seton Collection.
33. "Vyrazitel'noe dvizhenie," in *Metod* 1:16–82.
34. Gabriel Ledesma, "Tainy udivitel'nogo iskusstva Eizenshteina," in Iurenev, *Eizenshtein v vospominaniiakh sovremennikov*, 252–53.
35. This episode is told by one of the workers on the hacienda who had to take the injured actor to the hospital. The interview with him is featured in the Mexican documentary *Eisenstein en Mexico: El circulo eterno* (Canal 22, 1993).
36. Quoted in Olivier Debroise, "Dreaming on Top of the Pyramid: Mexico and Cultural Exchanges in the Early 1930s" (paper delivered at New York University, New York, NY, 2002), courtesy of the author.
37. Quoted in ibid.
38. Thomas Walsh, *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico: The Illusion of Eden* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 152.
39. Ibid., 154.

40. Katherine Anne Porter, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1965), 141.
41. In the first version of the story, the identification between the goddess and pulque is even more explicit.
42. Porter, *Collected Stories*, 143.
43. Ibid., 168.
44. Ibid., 158.
45. Walsh, *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico*, 56.
46. Ibid., 155.
47. Mark Busby, "Katherine Anne Porter and Texas: Ambivalence Deep as the Bone," in *From Texas to the World and Back: Essays on the Journeys of Katherine Anne Porter* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2001), 141.
48. Walsh, *Katherine Anne Porter and Mexico*, 155.
49. I am grateful to Olivier Debroise for bringing this information to my attention.
50. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 435.
51. BFI Archives, Marie Seton Collection.
52. Letter from Eisenstein to Seymour Stern, February 1932, New York. Courtesy of Olivier Debroise.
53. Quoted in Karetnikova and Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, 156–57.
54. According to psychoanalysis, fetishism is a way to place a substitute object between the male subject and the female lack (imagined as the wound) in order to ward off the anxiety of castration that this site of sexual difference provides by displacing the libidinal investment onto the object.
55. See Richard A. Kaye, "Losing His Religion: Saint Sebastian as Contemporary Gay Martyr," in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, ed. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London: Routledge, 1996).
56. The sexual explicitness and the homoeroticism of the drawings became the source of Sinclair's anger: in a letter to Harry Dana dated August 2, 1933, he says as a way of refuting the fact that Eisenstein is a "genius": "Suppose also I should tell you that the great artist is a sexual pervert, and that he shipped into the United States an enormous mass of unthinkably filthy drawings and photographs, the former made on my time and the latter made with our money!"
57. *Metod* 2:494.
58. Ibid., 495–96.
59. Letter from Jean Charlot to Marie Seton, March 1950. BFI Archives, Marie Seton Collection.
60. Quoted in Iampolskii, "'Organicheskaia mashina' u Eizenshteina i Disneia," 54.
61. Another aspect of this utopian idea is the conquest of rational mind over nature, and the machine as its ultimate manifestation, as Iampolskii discusses in his article (see above).
62. *Metod* 1:15.
63. Fragment of Eisenstein's notebook dated December 31, 1932. Ibid., 24.
64. Nesbet, "*Ivan the Terrible* and 'The Juncture of Beginning and End,'" in *Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration*, ed. LaValley and Scherr, 293.
65. Richard Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 64.

66. Alfonso Ichon, *La religión de los totonacas de la Sierra* (México: INAH, 1983), 430. La Malinche was an indigenous woman who played a role in the mythology of the conquest similar to that of Pocahontas for North America, only much less romanticized. She was an interpreter and a mistress of Cortez, allegedly facilitating the conquest. Her status is ambiguous—she is at once a traitor to her own people and the mother of modern Mexico, known as "*la chingada*"—"the violated one." She plays an important role in the Mexican identity: as Carlos Fuentes bitterly put it, "We are all children of La Malinche."
67. Quoted in Nesbet, "*Ivan the Terrible*," 293. The symbolic importance of this interchange of clothes also sheds light on the series of photographs taken of Eisenstein in Mexico, most of which date to the months spent on the Tetlapayac hacienda, of the various tableau vivant from the colonial history of Mexico, in which Eisenstein himself is dressed in the various costumes from the "Fiesta" episode—now as a Jesuit priest, now as a Catholic bishop. The photograph is a photomontage, but probably alludes to this episode.
68. *Metod* 1:285.
69. Quoted in Viacheslav Ivanov, *Ocherki po istorii semiotiki v SSSR* (Moskva: Nauka, 1976), 113–14.
70. RGALI, F1923 op.2 d.231 1.17.
71. Quoted in Nesbet, "*Ivan the Terrible*," 297.
72. *Metod* 1:23.
73. RGALI, F1923–2-1046.
74. *Metod* 2:495.
75. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Anita Brenner Papers, 121.4.
76. Ibid.
77. This letter was first published in Russian in *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, and the only other scholars of Eisenstein who commented on its existence are Mikhail Iampolskii in an essay "Eizenshteinovsklii sintez," published in the collection *Uskol'zaiuschii kontekst: Russkaia filosofiia v XX veke*, and Oksana Bulgakowa in the chapter n Mexico in her biography of Eisenstein.
78. I thank Olivier Debroise for bringing this information and the primary sources, such as Eisenstein's letter to Palomino and a number of drawings and photographs, formerly from Palomino's private archive, to my attention.
79. *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 36/37 (1997–98): 236.
80. Iampolskii, "'Organicheskaia mashina' u Eizenshteina i Disneiia," 231.
81. *Metod* 2:494.
82. On the related controversy between Deborin and the 'mechanists,' see Peter Wollen in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. Wollen notes Eisenstein's fondness for the aphorism in Lenin's notebook, "In any proposition we can (and must) disclose as in a nucleus ('cell') the germs of all the elements of dialectics." Quoted in Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 47.
83. This letter is cited in full in the appendix to chapter 3.
84. Ibid.

1. Geduld and Gottesman, *The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva México!"* 150.
2. See Bulgakowa, *Sergei Eisenstein*.
3. See *Metod* 1:323–28, 241–45, 427–31.
4. Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars*, 209.
5. For an analysis of the use of lubok in the Russian/Soviet avant-garde, see Marjory Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
6. Báez-Jorge, *La Afrodita Barbuda*, 149.
7. Ibid., 150.
8. Quoted in Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*, 137.
9. Quoted in Karetnikova and Steinmetz, *Mexico According to Eisenstein*, 137–38.
10. Ever since Bazin's influential claim, deep focus has come to be seen as a feature of filmmaking style quite unlike, and in Bazin's work placed in opposition to, Eisenstein's montage.
11. Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*, 136.
12. Quoted in Báez-Jorge, *La Afrodita Barbuda*, 180–81.
13. See Stanley H. Brandes, *Skulls to the Living, Bread to the Dead* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 23. Also page 40: "To the question of European versus indigenous origins, there can be no simple resolution until more extensive colonial sources come to light."
14. Báez-Jorge, *La Afrodita Barbuda*, 166.
15. See Tsivian, *Ivan the Terrible*, 24–27.
16. Jose Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*.
17. Ibid.
18. Bolívar Echevarría, *Modernidad, mestizaje cultural, ethos barroco* (México: UNAM, 1994).
19. This understanding of the modernist project is theorized in Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*.
20. See Miriam Hansen's two essays "Of Lightning Rods, Prisms, and Forgotten Scissors: *Potemkin* and German Film Theory," *New German Critique* 96 (Spring 2006): 101–18; and "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema," *October* 109 (2004): 3–45.
21. 1935 exposé in *The Arcades Project*, quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 114.
22. There is a connection here between the baroque in its modern understanding, and some of Levy-Bruhl's ideas, which interested Eisenstein so much. Specifically, the temporal dimension here is implied in the essence of the law of participation as well as, by some contemporary accounts of the baroque, the baroque metaphysic, which is built on coexisting possible worlds containing the same things but differently arranged. See also Buck-Morss's *The Dialectic of Seeing* for the way Benjamin adopts Blanqui's version of the eternal return

of the same—that the new is always already old, an effect of the power of the market—for the modern version of the law of participation.

23. Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 174.
24. Ibid., 176.
25. Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History*, 132.
26. *Metod* 1:24–25.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Quoted in Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 278.
30. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1985), 166.
31. Quoted in Mikhail Iampolskii, "The Essential Bone Structure," 187.
32. Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 69.
33. Ibid., 70.
34. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 232.
35. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 174.
36. For a detailed look on Eisenstein's treatment of the mask in theater and cinema, see Ivanov, *Ocherki po istorii semiotiki v SSSR*, 161–67.
37. *Sobraniie Sochinenii*, t.1, 129.
38. Translation in Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 129.
39. Translation in ibid., 144.
40. Walter Benjamin, "Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays War and Warrior, Edited by Ernst Jünger," trans. Jerolf Wikoff, special Walter Benjamin issue, *New German Critique*, no. 17 (Spring 1979): 120–28.
41. Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 142.
42. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 109.
43. Ibid., 161.
44. Ibid., 170.
45. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 4:171.
46. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 171.
47. Bainard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981): 119.
48. Ibid., 165.
49. The footage of Tolteca is visually reminiscent of the shots in the "Prologue," of Aztecs against their pyramids. The name of the factory itself was symbolic in that it originally signified the ancient society of artists, thus inserting itself into the discourse of its pre-Columbian origins while at the same time presenting the new factory as "the face of Mexican modernity."
50. Anita Brenner, *Your Mexican Holiday: A Modern Guide* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), 53, quoted in James Oles, "La nueva fotografia y cementos Tolteca: Una alianza utopica," in *Mexicana: Fotografia Moderna en*

Mexico, 1923–1940 (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González and Generalitat Valenciana, 1998), 141.

51. "Convocatoria para un concurso artistico," quoted in ibid.
52. Ibid., 147.
53. James Oles links this image directly to Edward Weston's photographs of Teotihuacan; see ibid.
54. Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 12.
55. See Iampolskii, "Eizenshteinvskii sintez"; "'Organicheskaia mashina'" u Eizenshteina i Disneiia"; "Sublimatsiya kak formoobrazovanie."
56. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 160.
57. *Metod* 1:424.
58. *Metod* 1:426.
59. Ibid.
60. As Iampolskii aptly notices in "Eizenshteinovskii sintez," these "operations," which Eisenstein calls dialectical, in fact have nothing to do with the dialectics and are much closer to the Romantic model, verging on solipsism.
61. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* (London: Sage Books, 1994), 49.
62. For more on Agustín Jiménez and his work, see Carlos Cordova, *Agustín Jiménez y la vanguardia fotografica mexicana* (México: Editorial RM, 2005); *Mexicana: Fotografia moderna en Mexico, 1923–1940* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González and Generalitat Valenciana, 1998); and a special issue of *Alquimia*, "Agustín Jiménez: La vanguardia" (January–April 2001).
63. See Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).
64. The relationship between Eisenstein and Jiménez and the affinities between their aesthetic positions is a topic that merits a separate investigation, especially given Jiménez's subsequent collaborations with both Best Maugard and Roberto Montenegro on their cinematic projects of the late 1930s. However, because Jiménez's artistic development progresses largely after Eisenstein's departure from Mexico, I chose not to develop this topic further, as it lies outside the scope of this particular investigation.
65. See Alice Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference: Transatlanic Culture, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 64.
66. See Kahlo's diary and her correspondence.
67. See the description of this in Nesbet, *Savage Junctures*, 140–42: "The fetus was to leave a very definite mark on Eisenstein's interests. He himself was photographed with it, in several different poses and the expression on his face in those photographs is one of softened curiosity: Eisenstein's most maternal moment. . . . He could not, alas, take the embryonic being that had enthralled him so away with him, but in honor of that first fascinating specimen of prenatal life, he later acquired a related souvenir in Moscow. . . . 'In any event,' as Eisenstein confides to his notebooks, 'the fetus is dear to me.'"
68. *Metod* 1:249.

69. As Vilashini Cooppan discusses in relation to Severo Sarduy's representation of Cuba. See Vilashini Cooppan, "Mourning Becomes Kitsch: The Aesthetics of Loss in Severo Sarduy's *Cobra*," in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
70. I thank Vilashini Cooppan for letting me read her unfinished manuscript and for many conversations that led to the formulations of this section.

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